

8 April 2002

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
at the World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid**

President Aznar, Distinguished Heads of State and Government, Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Distinguished Delegates, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all, let me congratulate you, Mr. President, on your unanimous election to preside over the World Assembly on Ageing. I have no doubt that your widely acknowledged insight and leadership will help lead us to a very successful conclusion.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the government and people of Spain for hosting this important conference and especially for the warm hospitality extended to all of us. The contributions that Spain is making in this vital area are a source of inspiration and encouragement for the entire global community. I also would like to highly commend the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee of the World Assembly on Ageing for their excellent work.

Mr. President,

The 21st century is witnessing an unprecedented demographic revolution as the numbers of older persons rise dramatically along with their proportion in the population. A million men and women turn sixty every month, three-quarters of them in the developing world. The older population in developing countries is expected to quadruple during the next fifty years. The rapid pace of ageing will bring new and

increased demands to all countries in health care, employment and labour markets, social protection measures and economic growth.

And let us not forget that, barring fatal illness or accident, each and every one of us will one day become an older person. Therefore, ageing cannot be an issue of concern only to particular individuals, societies or countries; it is, rather, a common issue that affects all individuals, societies and countries. In the coming years, the ageing of the human population will be a universal force that has the power to shape the future as much as globalization.

Twenty years ago, in Vienna, at the First Assembly on Ageing the International Plan of Action on Ageing was adopted, which greatly contributed to raising world-wide public awareness on ageing. Based on the Plan of Action, many countries have taken various policy measures, including the establishment of national coordinating mechanisms, to support older persons.

Yet, unlike other global issues such as the environment or poverty eradication, ageing has not received as much attention as it deserves from the international community. Therefore the convening of the Second World Conference on Ageing this year is very timely indeed. Our task here in Madrid is to revise and elaborate the International Plan of Action on Ageing in order to reflect global trends affecting aging.

I would like to stress that the international development targets set forth in the Millennium Declaration will not be achievable without the mainstreaming of ageing and concerns of older persons into development frameworks and poverty eradication strategies. Older persons should be regarded as an asset, not a burden. This truth is well recognized in the folk wisdom of many countries. As the old proverb says, "There are many a good tune played on an old fiddle."

The skills, experience, knowledge and wisdom of the older people should be put to use for promoting human capacity building and sustained economic growth, which will benefit both older persons and society, particularly in the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century. Of course, in so doing we must always respect the wishes of the individual older people concerned.

Mr. President,

All governments must emphasize the mainstreaming of ageing into national policy planning and implementation based on the International Plan of Action. Health care, housing provision, income security and the full participation of older persons in society should be our top priorities. The need for protection of human rights of older persons should also be highlighted in the newly adopted International Plan of Action. Abuse, discrimination or violence against the aged should be eradicated once and for all.

As President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, I urge all Member States to render their best efforts for the early and effective implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing. We must strive to achieve the empowerment of older persons and their full participation in all aspects of society. Let us combine our efforts to bring about a society for all ages. Today we are still at an early stage of our long journey toward this goal. But I am confident that when we finally reach our objective, we will look back on the 2002 Madrid Conference as one of the most important milestones along the way.

Thank you.