

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

--

**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS**

**1 October 2007**

The theme of this year's International Day of Older Persons focuses our attention on the challenges and opportunities of ageing.

Population ageing brings significant economic and social challenges, for developed and developing countries alike. Sobering statistics show that some 80 per cent of the world's population are not covered by social protection in old age. Finding ways to provide economic support for a growing number of older persons, through sustainable pension programmes and new social protection measures, is a daunting task, particularly in developing countries.

Yet at the other side of the equation, we have one of the great achievements of our time -- considerably extended life expectancies in nearly all parts of the world, thanks to improved standards of health care. Older persons now have many more opportunities to keep contributing to society beyond any set retirement age. Our views on what it means to be old are changing all the time. Where older persons were sometimes seen as a burden on society, they are now increasingly recognized as an asset that can and should be tapped.

The role of older persons in economic and social development is a major feature of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, as is promoting democracy and the rights of older persons through their participation in all aspects of society. This year, we mark the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Madrid Plan, and the launch of its first review and appraisal. Crucially, this will be based on an inclusive and participatory approach, engaging older persons themselves in the process.

This International Day of Older Persons is an opportunity to stimulate discussion among all stakeholders on progress in implementing the Madrid Plan, in line with the Millennium Development Goals and the broader UN development agenda. I urge you all -- Member States, NGOs, the UN system, older persons and their organizations -- to seize this opportunity, today and in the months ahead. Together, taking a balanced approach to both the challenges and opportunities of ageing, we will be able to give life to our shared vision of a society for all ages.