

**Ministerial Conference on Ageing**  
**Of the United Nations Economic commission for Europe**  
**(UNECE)**  
**in Berlin 11 to 13 September 2002-09-17**

**Plenary Session on 12<sup>th</sup> September – General Debate**

**On behalf of**  
**the accredited non-governmental organisations**

**Statement by Sylvia Beales – HelpAge International**

**Topic: North-south Sharing of Experience – Older People as actors in development**

**Development Issues within all countries**

---

**Madame President**  
**Excellencies**  
**Ladies and gentlemen**

It is an honour and a privilege to be able to address these words to you on behalf of the Non Governmental Organisations that are active on issues of ageing and development in the region of the Economic Commission of Europe and beyond.

In Madrid in April of this year over 1000 NGOs met at the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Assembly on Ageing to debate issues of development and rights of older persons. We declared in our final statement that ' a process of globalisation without human rights and equality is...unacceptable, and this is especially imperative in the cases referring to the rights of older persons'. Our shared commitment to global social sustainability requires us to take positive social policy decisions that are inclusive of persons of all ages, and draw in the excluded, the poor and the vulnerable.

We would like to recall the commitments made in Madrid to build a future for all ages, which guarantees the rights of older persons, and specifically their right to development. We also want to emphasise the absolute necessity of resolute north/south action - and collaboration between government and civil society - to deliver on this promise.

Demographic trends in all regions of the world – and most dramatically in the developing world – demonstrate that women and men, including the extremely poor and disadvantaged, are living longer. By 2050 numbers of persons over 60 across the world will outnumber those who are under 15. By living longer they are contributing for a longer period to their families and communities. But many are also carrying life long problems associated with economic and social status – including poverty, gender based discrimination, deficiencies in health, difficulties of access to essential services, HIV/AIDS and persistent human rights abuse - to their years of later life.

Older people in the developing world tell us of their struggles. Where the pension (if it exists at all) or other income is barely enough to ensure food, shelter and medical attention. Where there is a growing phenomenon of street elderly. Where there is the shame of destitution after lifetimes of work for the family and country. They tell us of their struggle for education, for access to 'life long learning'. As a South African pensioner of 90 put it some days ago during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg 'Tell the leaders we are old and suffering. Life is too bad. People have no houses. We have no bread. Our children have no work. We have fought all our lives for a better world. I wish it were better but it isn't.' Sadly we know from our collective experience across the world that this voice is not a lone one, but too representative of the terrible conditions faced by millions of our world's older citizens.

They tell us of the actions they take to make improvements for themselves and their families, in the face of at times overwhelming obstacles. And they continue to share the resources they may have with their families and with each other, as sharing is not only natural – but also necessary for survival. Many of these struggles are also experienced by older people in poverty in this region too, especially in the countries in transition.

As we have heard many times, the experience of ageing in a world that idolises and rewards youth is not so different wherever people are growing old. Poverty remains the greatest risk factor in old age – without the resources to purchase services which are supposed to constitute our basic right, such as water, food, shelter, health, poverty and discrimination in later life is a certainty.

Action by both governments and civil society in north and south is required to put an end to these inequities. The means for action are existing international agreements, translated into action at national level. For example, the first Millennium Development Goal calls for the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, conditions faced by millions of the world's older women and men. The eighth goal calls for a global partnership for development which might properly be referred to as a framework for achieving the 18 targets so far agreed within the MDGs. In support of these are the commitments made in Madrid in April this year. Governments agreed to include action on the poverty of older women and men within the context of the MDGs, to take action to ensure their right to development, and to end abuses of their human rights. New policy approaches to social protection can promote the productive capacities and contributions of older women and men to the benefit of all generations.

The Economic Commission of Europe is a region of great extremes. The 12 countries of the European Union together with Canada and the United States represent the bulk of the world's wealth. We all carry a significant responsibility for ensuring that resource transfer favours the poor in line with agreed international goals to eradicate poverty and ensure development. Yet the implementation strategy under discussion here only mentions resource transfer between countries in the sense of 'best practice'. We need greater clarity regarding the use of all resources, especially financial support, to contribute to the realisation of the goals to which we are all

committed within this region and further afield. Resource transfer – of finance, technical expertise and of experience – is required to meet the targets agreed.

Madame President

North-south resource transfer also involves the NGOs. The NGOs we represent want to work with governments in creating societies that are committed to, and prepared for, a world where longevity is no longer a burden, a time of life to be feared. We want to work with you to create societies that are for all ages, built on values of solidarity, social justice and well-being throughout life. We know that investing in older women and men brings returns for all ages. We NGOs and those with whom we work will do our best to bring our resources, experience, knowledge, contributions and voices to achieve shared international development goals. We can work together to play our part in building this society to meet the challenges which face us today.

Thank you.