AGEING-A Challenge and an Opportunity for the Countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia
Chisinau, Moldova, 13-16 March 2007

SOCIAL POLICIES AND POPULATION AGEING

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The twenty-first century is often called THE AGE OF AGEING. It is estimated that globally around one million persons cross the age of 60 every month.

The number of older persons is expected to increase from around 600 million in the year 2000 to almost 2,000 million by the middle of this century.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Since 1950, the proportion of the world’s elderly population has changed from 1 in 13 to 1 in 10. In the first half of this century, this proportion is projected to double to 21 percent.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Compared to this, the proportion of children is projected to drop by a third from 30 to 21 percent.

In certain countries, the number of older persons already exceeds the number of children.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Birth rates have fallen below the replacement levels. In some countries, by the middle of this century, the number of older persons is projected to be more than twice that of children.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The fastest growing group of the older population is the ‘old old’ or those above the age of 80.
In the beginning of this century, the octogenarians numbered 70 million. Their numbers are projected to increase to more than five times over the next 50 years. Currently, octogenarians constitute 11 percent of the world’s older population. By 2050, 27 percent of the older population will be 80 years and over.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Population ageing is often referred to as A FEMALE PHENOMENON.

Older women outnumber older men the more so as age increases.

Current sex ratios in developing countries average 88 men per 100 women. In developed countries the average sex ratio stands at 71 men per 100 women.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The UNECE region is experiencing unprecedented demographic changes and has the highest proportion of older persons.

Between 1998 and 2025 the proportion of older persons is projected to increase from 20 to 28 per cent.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
“We are aware that our increasingly integrated region consists of societies at vastly different levels of economic and social development and that a number of countries with economies in transition are less equipped to face the challenges of population ageing. Thus assistance to these countries should be enhanced”.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Eastern Europe elderly population (000) 1950 - 2025

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Eastern Europe Sex Ratio 1950-2025

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Eastern Europe Crude Birth rate (/000) 1950 - 2025

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Eastern Europe Crude Death Rate (/1000) 1950 - 2000

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
These demographic trends which every country is undergoing are having significant social, economic and political effects on society.

Moreover, as a result of the radical social and cultural changes that are taking place throughout the world, the stability of society has been shaken in many countries and the scale of values altered. Traditional approaches which used to meet the needs of older persons are also undergoing change.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Population ageing poses unique challenges to every society because, unlike other population growth variables such as the fertility and mortality rates which, to a considerable extent can be influenced by government policies, the process of population ageing is in actual fact irreversible.
The attention of every government should not be aimed on whether it can change the basic process of ageing, but rather to the very issues that arise from this process. Moreover, since this phenomenon is without any precedent in the history of mankind, to meet these new challenges new policies are required.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The world of the twenty-first century is experiencing an extraordinary revolution in longevity. During the second half of the 20th century, life expectancy has increased by about 20 years, and is expected to extend a further 10 years by 2050.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
It must be admitted, however, that, in spite of everything, there has not been a true democratisation of longevity. Is it not a fact that while the world, especially the Western developed world, has succeeded in adding years to life, it has not yet succeeded in adding life to years?

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Do we really have an equal opportunity to a healthy longevity?

Is it a myth to say that older persons really experience aging as a time of fulfilment?

Are our societies full of man-made barriers and prejudices, as a result of which we are putting one age group against the other?

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Various countries stand today at a critical turning point for confronting the challenges and issues generated by a projected rapidly growing population.

This phenomenon calls for the formulation of new social policies and the finding of the resources needed for implementing these policies successfully.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Governments in countries with economies in transition must be careful not to repeat the same mistakes committed in the past by a number of Western countries who, in so far as meeting the needs of their older citizens were concerned, were more preoccupied with meeting their "humanitarian" needs and issues.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Moreover, one cannot ignore the fact that the approach to these issues should not be treated in isolation.

It should rather form an integral part of an over-all national development planning programme of each country.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
“To be effective policies in response to population ageing should have a holistic approach, and be pursued in a co-ordinated way over a wide range of policy areas. Account must be taken of the multifaceted and intertwined challenges and opportunities arising from population ageing and to devise a framework from which effective policy responses can flow”.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
“Our approach to ageing is all-inclusive, promoting the development of a society for all ages through the strengthening of intergenerational and intragenerational solidarity”.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
In the Western world, our ageing populations are becoming victims of professional models of care.

Older persons are often viewed as making excessive demands on government expenditure.

On their part, governments are encountering increasing difficulties in paying for the care of older persons

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
In many western countries, Social Policy analysts in the field of ageing tended to concentrate more on what can be termed as the "burden of dependency" that old age is believed to entail.

Older persons are portrayed as dependent individuals, lacking social autonomy, neglected, and a burden to the "producing" world.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Older persons are often described in terms of "cost factors" or the "burden of the future" and portrayed as requiring more and more help and support which neither the family nor the State will be able to afford.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The pressing needs and demands of the older population are often viewed only from the country's economic point of view. Consequently, the social welfare policies which had been prevalent in a number of Western countries had, in turn, led to the creation of the Welfare State ideology based on a complicated system of depersonalised social services. It tended to replace rather to complement family policy.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The welfare programmes adopted by various governments were aimed more at protecting and caring for the older members. They were based upon the assumption that "society has a major responsibility to provide basic social welfare and support for all persons".

This preoccupation has led to the creation of a relatively passive and disenchanted sector of the population.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Very little emphasis was put on the participation and contribution of older persons in the very developmental process of their countries. Such a strategy resulted in creating a rigid age differentiation, a dependency syndrome of older persons and, worse still, their marginalisation.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
To counteract this there is an urgent need for a radical change of perspective breaking the policy of segregation of older persons and replacing it with a strategy of participation.

We need to have a new philosophy of ageing. We need to do away with our self-made barriers and obstacles towards older persons.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
“We are aware that promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms are essential for the active participation of older persons in all aspects in life and for the creation of a society for all ages.

We commit ourselves to ensure the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, and civil and political rights of persons and the elimination of all forms of violence, abuse and neglect, and of discrimination against older persons”.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The central focus of policy must be the integration of older persons into society. They want an increasing say in their lives. They want to be empowered to solve their own problems.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
“No individual should be denied the opportunity to participate in society and to benefit from economic and social developments. Older persons are at a greater risk of being denied that opportunity and that is why it is essential to combat all forms of discrimination AND ENSURE THE FULL ENJOYMENT OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS”.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The challenges of population ageing can best be met by adjusting policies over a wide range of economic and social sectors and activities. If older persons are to participate fully in their society, they require independence, an adequate income, suitable housing, good health, adequate services and scope for participation in work, education and society.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The Vienna and the Madrid International Plans of Action on Aging, strongly emphasised the fact that, while every society has a duty to assist those older persons who are in real need of support, it should equally explore the possibilities of utilising and benefiting from the varied resources of older persons. "The aging population constitutes a valuable and important component of society's human resources".

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
It was reiterated that the challenges and strains of an ageing population need to be studied as interacting with other social and economic challenges and strains associated with an accelerated development.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Poverty and disease are often the main obstacles of sustainable longevity and successful aging.

However, equally destructive are the passivity and the feeling of oneself as a parasite.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Ageism and age discrimination have, to a large extent, transformed the phenomenon of ageing, a natural process, into the problem of ageing.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
However important the role of the State and that of Non-Governmental Organisations, it is equally important that older persons themselves actively participate and contribute to the very developmental progress of their country.

Older persons should also be regarded as contributors to and agents of a country's developmental effort and not as mere beneficiaries.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
“We reiterate that we have the primary responsibility to pursue this objective working in close cooperation with civil society, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders, particularly older persons themselves. Their contribution to the development of effective policy responses is vital”.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
By maximising the developmental potential of older persons, the entire nation would benefit. Innovative policies and programmes for encouraging, mobilising and securing the active participation of older persons in development and at utilising their contribution to the country’s economy and social life need to be further activated.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
This was precisely what was reiterated a number of times in The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. The first of the three Priority Directions precisely deals with the subject of older persons and development.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
No less than nine issues (the highest number in the whole document) were raised to ensure the implementation of this first Priority Direction. All had the underlying principle that older persons should remain integrated in society, participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies that directly affect their well-being, and share their knowledge and skills with younger generations.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The expectations of older persons and the economic needs of society demand that older persons be able to participate in the economic, political, social and cultural life of their societies. In this regard, the empowerment of older persons and the promotion of their full participation are essential elements for ACTIVE AGEING.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
We should not only promote the active participation of older persons in society by identifying and promoting opportunities, but we should encourage, support them and also manifestly appreciate their positive contribution to society.

In so doing, we are helping older persons to maximise their feeling of self worth. This is what is meant by Solidarity between Generations.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
In a number of countries, Voluntary Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations play a key role in the field of ageing.

Through such organisations and groups, older persons have an opportunity to add meaning to their life by being useful to others, by reaching beyond themselves.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Older persons are the best advocates of their own cause. One of the measures adopted by many countries at the national level to implement the recommendations of the Plan of Action on Aging, was the setting up of a National Committee on Aging as a permanent body. These national committees have proved to be an effective mechanism to promote the contribution of older persons in decision-making processes.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
This national committee serves as an excellent platform to ensure that older persons themselves actively participate in the process of formulating and of implementing programmes for their improved well-being.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Combating ageism, by making the public more aware of the positive contributions of older persons, and of the positive aspects of ageing, should be another main responsibility of every national committee.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The media need to be utilised better to highlight the positive aspects of ageing, portraying older persons more often, and highlighting their contribution to society. It should disseminate information about the fact that ageing is a natural phase in one's life cycle and that transition into old age is a gradual process.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
It is very important to have older persons themselves involved in the planning and running of these media programmes. They are the best agents of social change in so far as the phenomenon of ageing is concerned.

Moreover, through such programmes, older persons can still continue playing their traditional role of being transmitters of the cultural patterns and values, traditional aspects and folklore of their society.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Education is a crucial basis for an active and fulfilling life. Inspite of this, however, there are still many challenges to be faced.

“Promoting ways to eradicate functional illiteracy and to improve basic education levels of older persons and adult and late-life education should be recognised as a productive investment which …improves the quality of life and overall social development of older persons”.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The setting up of Universities of the Third Age have proved to be a very successful mechanism.

Moreover, special educative programmes for older persons featuring, amongst others, different facets of planning for a successful retirement need to be promoted on the community basis.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
A positive image of older persons should be promoted eradicating all negative stereotypes and attitudes leading to the segregation of older citizens.

In order to create a healthier and more active population of older persons, ageing should be regarded by one and all as an opportunity to be utilised.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
It is very important to address population from a gender perspective. Older women outnumber older men and this is the more so among the ‘old old’. There is a great diversity in their social and economic situation as compared to that of men.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Women are often trapped within a web of traditional values. They experience greater discrimination because of the sex segregated character of their society and the traditional value system.

An overwhelming majority of older women are illiterate, poor, socially dependent and lack the personal resources with which to cope with changing social conditions. Many have suffered throughout their lives from illiteracy, and low social status, simply because they were born female.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
It is critical to ensure the integration of a gender perspective into all policies, programmes and legislations.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
“Governments should take measures to mainstream gender issues and to remove all obstacles to achieving gender equality, to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to promote the advancement and empowerment of women throughout their entire life cycle”.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Social policy makers in the field of ageing are being faced with strong divergent views between the traditional and the modern situation the frail older persons face in their own society. On the one hand we have the vision of the traditional caring society where older persons had a defined place within the extended family wherein they lived in communal and integral harmony, assisted and sheltered from economic want and surrounded by esteem and social respect.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
On the other hand, we have the image of older persons in a modern society, increasingly isolated, underprivileged, and living on the margins of subsistence with living conditions no longer secured by well-rooted socio-cultural norms.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The issue becomes more complex when one realises that the traditional role of the family in the daily care and support of their frail elderly members is being subjected to various economic, social and psychological strains and seriously threatened.
“Governments should initiate or strengthen policies and programmes to address the special needs of all members of the family, respecting their rights, capacities and responsibilities. In order to do so, they should support, protect and strengthen the family to respond adequately to the needs of its members through the promotion of social, economic and family policies that stimulate and favour intergenerational and intragenerational solidarity”.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
CONCLUSION
Population ageing has become a world-wide phenomenon. Moreover, it has not only come to stay but, it will become more felt and acute with the passage of time.

Its repercussions are so wide-ranging and manifold that they can only be ignored at a tremendous cost to society.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Although the social involvement of older persons is a matter of personal choice, obstacles exist which could reduce their inclination to participate.

Attempts need to be made to foster such participation and to remove any obstacles preventing it. Such measures could include eliminating unjust age-related distinctions, and creating social networks, and information campaigns.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The time has come for society as a whole, the general public, the local community, the family and the individual citizen, whether young or old, to carry out a radical change of perspective.

A positive image of older persons needs to be promoted eradicating all negative stereotypes and attitudes leading to the segregation of older persons.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Older persons must be made aware that, as an intrinsic part of their society, they do not only have rights but also duties towards their society and their fellow co-citizens.

Their rights include those to live independently and with dignity.

Their duties include their remaining active in their society, sharing their wisdom and experience and adapting themselves to change.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
A number of decisions have to be taken with the co-operation of every social institution, be it the State, Non-Governmental Organisations, the community, the family members and last but not least, the older persons themselves.

Every partner has a very important role to play in ensuring a sustainable development for the older population.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
The phenomenon of ageing is neither a problem nor does it bring about any crisis. It is seen as such only by those who look at the older persons as mere receivers.

The developmental process, as defined by the United Nations, must enhance human dignity and ensure equity among age groups in the sharing of society's resources, rights and responsibilities.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
Successful ageing will only occur when an older person's personal dignity, sense of belonging and self worth are maximised.

Joseph Troisi, International Institute on Ageing, United Nations-Malta
THANK YOU

for your attention