

THE NGO DECLARATION

We non-governmental organisations welcome and appreciate this opportunity to address the Ministerial Conference. We are grateful to the Kingdom of Spain for hosting this important event. We are pleased to be here to work and interact with the governments. There are issues which we regard as critical which are not fully addressed.

A society for all ages, which means 'a society for all people', has to embrace all generations, respect the autonomy of citizens, and reinforce the imperatives of human rights, cooperation, and mutual understanding. A society for all ages has to be dedicated to the development of a decent quality of life for everyone and must be based on a non-discrimination approach, without prejudice, inter alia, of economic class, gender, education or ethnic origin.

We believe that the UN Principles for Older Persons are the basis for the realisation of the human rights of older people. The Principles define the ethics of the recognition of older persons in society and therefore must be the basis for all policy-making on ageing.

The Madrid Plan represents a unique framework to include older people in national, regional and local strategies, as they are not directly targeted in the Millennium Development Goals.

We present our point of view in the following statement:

Regarding Monitoring

In Berlin in 2002, we discussed the need for strong follow up to the commitments with a monitoring process and close working relationship between governments and NGOs. This has not yet taken place. We are disappointed that only 31 out of 56 UNECE

governments submitted reports, out of which only 12 have carried out the necessary work. Monitoring of RIS must be transparent and participatory. It should include contributions from NGOs and older people. It must be based on meaningful indicators mutually agreed upon with civil society. Monitoring must be adequately resourced as an integral part of the RIS.

We believe that the 'Task Force Monitoring RIS' in which government representatives, NGOs, researchers and other experts have worked together most successfully, should be continued.

Regarding Poverty

We are quite concerned that the focus has shifted away from certain essential elements of the Madrid Plan, in particular the commitment to providing adequate pensions and to substantially reducing poverty. It is imperative that the emphasis on development and poverty eradication contained in the Madrid Plan is recognised and explicitly reinforced.

Due to demographic changes in the region of UNECE, it is especially important that governments urgently address ageing within national poverty reduction and social protection strategies. It is equally vital to allocate dedicated budgets to ensure concrete action. In general, women will continue to be the major group of older persons, particularly the very old, being exposed to poverty.

Regarding Less Affluent Regions

As recognised in 2002, the ECE is a region of extremes, including a number of low and middle income countries. The Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) recognises this diversity. These countries continue to be challenged by structural poverty and its consequences. It has to be acknowledged that they are in a period of political and economic transition and must be priorities for support and assistance.

Regarding Health, Well-Being and the Life Course

It is essential to provide universal access to good quality, affordable and sustainable health care, social services, education and preventive measures. This should commence at early ages in order to promote and enhance health and well-being into the older years.

Regarding the Relationships between NGOs and Governments

Social cohesion is an absolute prerequisite for an inclusive society for all ages. To achieve this, government action and NGO activities on the ground must be linked together in a constructive manner, as called for by the Commission for Social Development. To a large extent NGO action rests on civic engagement and volunteer work; therefore, the necessary resources for this work needs support by governments and local authorities.

In order to ensure that the best interests of older people are served, policy-making on ageing must have coherence among different levels of government, which must work in partnership with NGOs and older people themselves.

Regarding the Bottom-up Approach

Governments are responsible for ensuring the right of full involvement of civil society and especially older persons in implementing the RIS and in developing plans and policies. In this respect, they are responsible for creating adequate conditions so that this can take place.

As a pensioner from Central Europe recently put it, *“we need information on international agreements and how our country is represented. We need to know what our government is promising at an international level so that we can call them to account at home.”*

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