

STATEMENT BY H. E. AMBASSADOR S. R. INSANALLY, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP OF 77, IN THE PLENARY OF THE 54TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON AGENDA ITEM 106: FOLLOW-UP ON THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE OLDER PERSONS

New York, 4 October 1999

Mr. President, distinguished delegates

In commemorating the International Year of Older Persons in 1999 the last year of the twentieth Century and indeed, the second millennium we cannot fail to recognize the important contribution which older persons have made to shape the present century and indeed, our civilization from time immemorial.

On behalf of the G-77 and China, I take this opportunity to salute and thank them for the legacy they have bestowed on our younger generation as they prepare to face the challenges of the future. Their accumulated wealth of experience and knowledge will undoubtedly provide tomorrow's adults with a solid foundation on which to build their own lives.

Mr. President, developing countries have long recognized the significance of an aging population for their national development. In most of our societies, the elderly are treated with honor and respect. No wonder then in 1992 when the Proclamation on Aging was adopted by consensus by the General Assembly, the co-sponsors of the relevant resolution were, significantly, the developing countries. That Resolution built upon the outcome of the World Assembly on Aging held in 1982 and on the United Nations Principles for Older Persons which were adopted in 1991. Along with the Secretary General's Global targets on Aging, the program of action sought to integrate national and international plans into a unified campaign to deal with the "graying" of the world's population. The Group of 77 remains firmly committed to this comprehensive and cooperative approach.

For while the problems of aging have been more associated with developed rather than developing countries perhaps because of lower fertility and mortality rates in the former - it is merely a matter of time before they are common to both. Statistics show that by the year 2005, more than 70% of all persons sixty years and over, will live in developing countries. The governments of these countries, faced as many of them are with heavy debt burdens and severe structural adjustment program simply cannot bear the costs of adequate social systems. Hopefully, we will have in the forthcoming reviews of the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women further opportunities to develop international cooperation to satisfy the needs of the elderly who, as we know, constitute one of the most vulnerable sectors of our societies.

Mr. President,

The life cycle approach to development has now gained wide international acceptance. The 1992 Proclamation on Aging observed that preparations for old age should begin in childhood and continue throughout life for the entire population. Such an approach could serve to integrate the concerns of the elderly international development strategies and plans. Special attention will have to be given to older women who have particular needs and thus, require programs and policies that are sensitive to their situation. In too many cases, women are disadvantaged in terms of their access to education, housing, healthcare and employment. Their contributions to the economy and society are generally unrecognized and unappreciated. This is the case not only in the home, but in the wider community. Yet, in Africa for example, where conflict and the HIV/AIDS prevail, the elderly are often forced to assume of head of the household when they themselves are

in need of care.

It is thus incumbent on policymakers to take account of these factors in order to provide an enabling environment for older persons, particularly women,, that would allow them to participate in the development process. In most developing countries, the family has traditionally been the source of support and care for the elderly. Today, however, the institution of the family is often undermined by such trends as migration, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, drug abuse and other socioeconomic changes. Despite its constraints, the governments must assume greater responsibilities for the nurture of the aged and protection of the family. It can only succeed, however, if other stakeholders in society including the private sector and community organizations are willing to assist in sustaining social programs for the elderly. In this context, the media certainly have a role to play in announcing public awareness, population aging, and the need to address the issue fully.

Mr. President, the Group of 77 and China calls for increased United Nations activities to address aging in the context of development. Programs in the areas of research, training and technical cooperation relating to aging can contribute to a clearer understanding of available policy options and thereby assist national efforts to achieve global targets on aging by the year 2001. Adequate resources must therefore be provided to those United Nations agencies which are concerned with these social issues. At the same time, recognizing that the problems of development must be treated in a comprehensive and holistic fashion the international community must agree on a closely knit strategy of cooperation aimed at creating better living conditions for all the world's people. Such a strategy could include increased ODA flows, debt reduction, investment and trade opportunities, employment and assessed health, education and other social benefits which would allow the disadvantaged societies of developing countries, including the elderly, to advance.

Mr. President, the G-77 and China firmly believes that with renewed effort and commitment, we can overcome the hurdles of injustice, inequality, and marginalization, which exists between and within our societies today. By joining hands and working together we can truly develop what the Secretary-General has called "a society for all ages."

I thank you.