

Statement by Ambassador Bagher Asadi (Islamic Republic of Iran), Chairman of the Group of 77 at the Session of the Commission for Social Development acting as the Preparatory Committee for the Second World Assembly of Ageing

New York, 1 March 2001

Mr. Chairman,

Let me offer, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, our heartiest congratulations to you and the other distinguished members of the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee on the assumption of your duties. The significant progress achieved in our work thus far, despite what might have appeared at moments as rather slow or even less than expected or satisfactory, clearly attests to the great skill and wise guidance of your leadership. We are confident that you will steer the whole process to full success. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretariat for all their good work, including the preparation of the documents before us.

Mr. Chairman,

Since the first World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid, almost two decades ago, the phenomenon of an ageing population has reached unexpected proportions worldwide and has become a development priority in most of our countries. Statistics indicate that in this new century, the majority of the world's older people will be found in developing countries. Indeed, according to the Secretary General's report, by the year 2050 the proportion of persons aged 60 years and over is expected to more than double worldwide and to triple for developing countries. Falling mortality and birth rates are significant contributing factors.

The developing countries that constitute the Group of 77 as well as China, therefore, welcome the convening of the second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002 to urgently and effectively address the needs and concerns of older people worldwide. We look forward to adopting an outcome document that particularly recognises the special needs of older persons from developing countries. This document should take into account the findings of the review and appraisal process of the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing. Similarly, it should build upon the 18 United Nations Principles for Older Persons of 1991. Furthermore, in keeping with all of our work in the United Nations, it is important that a gender perspective is mainstreamed throughout the entire outcome document.

With respect to the procedural arrangements for the second World Assembly, the Group of 77 and China look forward to representation at the highest political level. We take this opportunity to thank the Government of Spain for hosting this event and we are confident that the participation of non governmental organisations in the Assembly will contribute immensely to our deliberations.

I deem it necessary to underline here that it is equally important to ensure that the arrangements for the World Assembly next year would facilitate the effective and meaningful participation of the developing countries. The proposed multiplicity of committees would, in effect, deprive many developing countries with small delegations from such a participation. That is why we strongly oppose it. The Group proposes, instead, that there be a plenary supported by a Committee of the Whole which will be mandated with the drafting of the updated Plan of Action. The Committee of the Whole may also listen to the contributions of UN agencies and NGOs, in accordance with agreed modalities for participation. This committee may also establish working groups as needed to support its work. At the same time, a parallel NGO Forum can provide for important exchanges of views by NGOs and governments.

Mr. Chairman,

I would now wish to turn to the proposed Revised International Plan of Action on Ageing contained in document E/CN.5/2001/PC/2. This document provides a good basis for discussions since it contains important information and recommendations on the new challenges of an ageing society. The foremost challenge remains, however, particularly for developing countries - the achievement of secure ageing. It is therefore proposed that the theme of the outcome document be "The Achievement of Secure Ageing - Equality, Participation and Dignity". This proposed theme not only takes into account the focus of the 1999 International Year of Older Persons but also builds on three important elements of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

Secondly, it is important that the outcome document fully reflects present and future challenges to be faced by older persons in developing countries. In this regard, due consideration for the centrality of the perspective of developing countries in the text is of paramount importance for us. Moreover, the social, economic and developmental situation of developing countries must be highlighted. Similarly, there is a need to address the increasing concern of development agencies for securing the human and financial resources needed for adjusting policies and programmes to population ageing. At the same time, it is important that the image of older persons is projected in a positive manner so that their continuing contributions to society are recognised and fostered. For those less independent older persons, adequate care and protection will need to be examined.

In terms of specific proposals regarding the structure of the revised Plan of Action, the Group of 77 and China would call for a shorter, more focused and action-oriented text. We recognise that the document before us contains the recommendations of the Committee of Experts constituted to support preparations for the second World Assembly. Nevertheless, the present Plan of Action is too general, does not have the format of a policy-oriented and targeted structure expected of Plan of Actions to be adopted by member States. The Group of 77 and China would, therefore, propose that the revised text be summarised in a manner that highlights the main challenges and the specific policies that are needed. The language should be clear, less conceptual and provide a basis for future policies by member States.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, I must emphasize that the Group of 77 and China looks forward to an early negotiation of the revised Plan of Action. In this regard, we are willing to support the convening of a number of intersessional meetings before the next meeting of the Preparatory Committee. And, of course, of more immediate concern, we look forward to a successful outcome of this first session of the Preparatory Committee.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.