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DPI/NGO Briefing
**Improving the Quality of Life for Older Persons:
Advancing UN Global Strategies**
In Observance of the International Day of Older Persons
5 October 2006

Summary

The DPI/NGO Section held its first regular weekly NGO briefing of the fall 2006 season on 5 October 2006 in observance of the International Day of Older Persons (IDOP). Entitled, “Improving the Quality of Life for Older Persons: Advancing UN Global Strategies,” the briefing promoted positive images of ageing and looked at innovative initiatives to improve living conditions of the elderly.

Mr. Juan Carlos Brandt, Chief, DPI/NGO Section, moderated the plenary session and opened the event by reading Secretary-General’s message on the occasion of IDOP. The President of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, **H.E. Ms. Haya Rashed Al Khalifa** then addressed the audience and stressed the important role older persons play in society and the growing need for empowerment of this demographic. **Ms. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid**, Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), provided the keynote address in which she stressed the growing need for policy makers to understand the changing demographics in order to plan accordingly, and the importance of dialogue between generations. Three major areas that deserved more attention: the support of human rights and freedom of older persons; the enabling of the full participation in society of older persons; and the assurance that the elderly benefit from care and protection. In her welcoming remarks, **Ms. Florence Denmark**, Chair, the NGO Committee on Ageing, noted the importance of an enabling environment and quality of life in the productivity of older persons.

After a short break, a panel discussion moderated by **Dr. Alexandre Sidorenko**, UN Focal Point on Ageing, Department of Economics and Social Affairs (DESA) followed. Five representatives from different geographical areas of the world discussed the living conditions of the elderly, strategies to improve those and the perceptions of the ageing population. **Dr. Astrid Stuckelberger**, Gerontologist, Institute for Social and Preventive Medicine, University of Geneva, Switzerland, representing Europe, stressed the importance of the inclusion of older persons in all aspects of society. Initiatives, such as age-friendly cities, representation in the Human Rights Council, and progressive retirement should become a focus for the betterment of the lives of older persons and, subsequently, society.

Dr. Gilda A. Glasinovich, United Nations Representative, Technical Adviser, Gender and Immigrant Populations, Economic and Social Council, New York, representing Latin America, discussed the growing population of older persons and the need for their increased organization and representation. Indigenous people in Latin America, especially the older generation, face ethnic and cultural exclusion as most do not speak Spanish or Portuguese, have poor access to healthcare, and reside in rural areas in a region where urban migration for work is prominent. As migration is becoming an increasing global trend, the nursing industry needs to be able to adapt to the varying cultural needs of older persons to ensure the accuracy of diagnosis and proper course of treatment.

Ms. Maya Hammoud, speaking on behalf of her father, **Mr. Hassan Hammoud**, Professor, Education and Sciences Division, Lebanese American University, Beirut, Lebanon, represented the Middle East. In his speech, Mr. Hammoud pointed out the growing rate of older persons in the population of 300 million in the 22 countries in the Middle East. In 1975, the population of older persons was 7.8 million; in 2000 the population increased to 15 million; and by 2025 the population was expected to reach 41.6 million. Mr. Hammoud also discussed the 2012 Arab Plan of Action on Ageing, which aims to improve the quality of life of older persons by increasing government subsidies and social programmes and by lowering taxes for older persons.

Dr. Tukufu Zuberi, Director, Population Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, representing Africa, spoke of the inequality Africa faces compared to the rest of the world. Although Africa's population was the oldest on earth, population ageing has been a recent trend. Along with population ageing, the health revolution also came to Africa later. Nonetheless, Africa's population is expected to increase from 1.6 billion to 2.3 billion by the year 2025. Dr. Zuberi spoke of the heavy burden faced by the older generation, particularly elderly women, as the impact of HIV and AIDS was being felt with grandmothers usually left to care for their grandchildren. Therefore, the ageing process brings with it a gender problem. In conclusion, Prof. Zuberi said, although the ageing of the African population was occurring at a slower rate than the rest of the world, the social responsibilities of older persons were increasing as a result of the social and economic environment of Africa.

Ms. Rajul Mehta, Founder-Director, Project OutrEACH, Bombay, India and New York, New York, shared her knowledge of the issues facing older persons in India, specifically those residing in Bombay, India. Ms. Mehta stressed the importance of increased participation and inclusion of older persons in society. The poor infrastructure in India, such as the dug up roads, lack of housing, and poor public transportation did not provide a friendly environment for older persons. The needs and issues of older persons needed to become a priority and awareness needed to increase before an inclusive and friendly environment for older persons can be advanced.

After the briefing, the NGO Committee on Ageing hosted a luncheon for the speakers and honouring **Mrs. Nane Annan**. The Secretary-General, **Mr. Kofi Annan** made a surprise appearance at the event, escorting Mrs. Annan. Both made brief remarks at the event and Mrs. Annan was presented with a small token of appreciation for her support of the ageing issues.

As a prelude to the programme, a slideshow presentation entitled "Inner Age: A Portrait Project", created by Annie Levy, was presented. A mandolin orchestra from Glen Ridge, New Jersey performed at the end.

The briefing was attended by about 400 representatives of NGOs, UN and Permanent Mission staff. ///