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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: rethinking and strengthening social
development in the contemporary world**

Statement submitted by International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

The International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics is committed to the highest levels of achievement in gerontological research and training worldwide, with a view to promoting the highest quality of life and well-being of all people as they experience ageing at the individual and societal levels. With regard to the priority theme for the fifty-third session of the Commission for Social Development, “Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world”, the Association would like to advance the concept of building the capacities of older persons through education and training as a means to embrace their potential, thereby ensuring the sustainable development of an ageing society.

We may all remember the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, in which it is stated that mainstreaming ageing into global agendas is essential, that the task is to link ageing to other frameworks for social and economic development and human rights, and that it is essential to recognize the ability of older persons to contribute to society by taking the lead not only in their own betterment but also in that of society as a whole. In the Plan, it is also stated that forward thinking calls us to embrace the potential of the ageing population as a basis for future development.

Recognizing the ability of older persons to contribute to society means not only utilizing the knowledge, skills and experience accumulated throughout their lives, but also further developing their individual capacity to better themselves and to contribute to the betterment of society. At the fifty-second session of the Commission, we identified the concept of access to high-quality continuing adult education and training programmes as one of the proven strategies for people’s empowerment that may enable older persons to become more valued members of society.

With respect to the social provisions for older persons, it is important for society to move away from a medical and welfare approach towards a rights-based approach. What is even more important, however, is to value older persons by giving them social provisions in return for their improved capacity to contribute to society, rather than simply as a social right. That is, older persons want to be treated as intrinsically valuable persons who contribute to society, with their capacity as is or preferably improved, rather than being treated as deserving persons based simply on human rights.

The social welfare system for older persons is no longer an effective and efficient model for resolving problems associated with individual and population ageing because of the increasing economic burden borne by society. An ageing population is generally feared by Governments because of its perceived increasing burden to society. However, this perception is based on widespread negative assumptions regarding ageing and older persons that disregard the increasing body of scientific evidence that shows that older persons can develop their capacity even into advanced old age. The social and legal system of retirement demarcated only by chronologic age derives from these negative perceptions and, in turn, reinforces them. A growing amount of evidence shows that it is possible to empower and build the capacities of older persons. Along with the need to reform social welfare programmes, it is essential to plan for capacity-building among older persons and their consequent mainstreaming into an ageing society. Without embracing the

potential of the ageing population as a basis for future development, it will be far more difficult for society to bear the economic burden resulting from individual and population ageing.

In conclusion, we strongly believe that the sustainable development of an ageing society depends on empowering older persons through systematic education and training. We therefore strongly recommend that all States Members of the United Nations include lifelong education and training for older persons as one of the important goals in the post-2015 development agenda.
