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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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

New Direction of Life-Long Learning for Those Aged 40 and Over

1. Introduction, Objective and Purpose

In almost all instances, it is generally assumed that ageing causes a decrease in capacity and working ability. However, an increasing number of scientific studies have revealed that human capacity can be continuously developed through education and training, particularly from the mid-life course around the age of 40 years. Despite this evidence, those who have reached the age of 65 years are usually forced to exit the labour market because of assumed decreased capacity, and those beyond the age of 65 years are regarded as requiring social support. Unless we shift our way of thinking to look at ageing and older persons in a more positive light, sustainable social development of our ageing society will not be possible.

We represent the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG), with a history of 65 years since its founding, the largest international multi-disciplinary academic association, with more than 50,000 individual researchers and educators from 82 national academic member societies in 70 countries all over the world. Many IAGG researchers have contributed to the scientific studies on ageing and capacity.

We would like to remind UN Member States of the written statement submitted by IAGG to the 52nd Session of the Commission for Social Development in 2014. In that statement, we proposed a paradigm called the “Age-Integrated Society” to help build sustainable ageing societies. The purpose of this current statement is to suggest a new way of thinking, to make our ageing society sustainable and to help achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Overview of Issues Related to the Work of IAGG

Since the adoption of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging in 1982, a significant policy recommendation for an ageing society has been the need for education and training for older persons. This need is also emphasized under the subject of “life-long learning” in the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Most life-long learning programs have disregarded the increasing evidence of the possibility to develop human capacity through systematic educational programs. In this regard, the gerontologists and geriatricians represented by IAGG may play an important role in developing educational and training programs for ageing persons.

The logic for participation of older persons in social development and in the larger society has been to apply the knowledge, skills and experiences of older persons to opportunities for paid or volunteer work. However, the knowledge, skills and experiences of older persons are often outmoded in a rapidly changing society. Without updating, their skills may no longer be effective in most occupations amid advances in knowledge and information technology.

In the interaction between individuals and organizations, those with fewer or outdated resources may be disadvantaged in occupational and volunteer activities. Such disadvantaged individuals may thereby be isolated, excluded from society, and subject to further discrimination. To increase and renew resources such as their

knowledge and skills is a way to strengthen the capacity of individuals and to empower them for stronger relationships in social transactions.

What is more significant in our ever ageing society is how to support the growing older population under a social welfare system, which was designed during the industrial era, in which the support ratio for the older population was relatively larger. We doubt the traditional social welfare model can sustainably support the increasing proportion of older persons aged 65 and over, which will take up to 40 per cent of the total population in some societies in the year 2050.

To build sustainable ageing societies, we need to systematically educate and train ageing and older persons for their continuous engagement in paid and volunteer work with enhanced knowledge and skills. The benefits of such education and training would include job creation, engagement in employment and volunteer activities, contribution to the national economy, and reduction in welfare expenses, thus leading to a sustainable ageing society.

If we could develop effective and systematic educational and training programs for ageing and older persons, considering emerging evidence that ageing is reversible in some respects and not necessarily associated with decreased capacity, then we would no longer need to worry about the social burden of supporting an older population, which is becoming healthier and more capable than generally thought.

3. Mission and Accomplishments of IAGG

The mission of IAGG is to promote the highest levels of achievement in gerontological research and training worldwide. IAGG interacts on behalf of its member associations with other international, inter-governmental and national governmental organizations in the promotion of gerontological interests globally. IAGG pursues these activities with a view of promoting the highest quality of life and wellbeing of all people as they experience ageing at an individual and societal level.

Over the past several years, IAGG has conducted educational and training programs called Master Classes in Ageing for young professionals in the practice of geriatric medicine and gerontology. These Master Classes have taken place in the global regions of IAGG including Europe, Asia, Middle-East, and Latin America. IAGG has also built its Global Ageing Research Network (GARN) of 587 research institutes of ageing all over the world. Through these programs and networks, many individual members of IAGG have been involved in developing a variety of educational programs for ageing and older persons in their respective countries.

In light of our strong educational and research capacity, we at IAGG are in a position to develop effective educational and training programs for ageing and older persons, to equip them with renewed and updated knowledge and skills for continuous occupational and volunteer work activities.

4. Recommendations

We at IAGG recommend the following policies, particularly regarding educational and training programs for those aged 40 years and over:

(1) Development of systematic educational and training programs: These programs should be based on new scientific evidence on the relationship of ageing to capacity and working ability; they must be differentiated from general life-long learning programs which do not regard individual or population ageing; they need to include knowledge about health promotion in ageing; they may be conceived in categories of general cultural courses, occupational courses, and job training courses; they need to include information technology skills; they could be offered in an off-line or on-line format; and they should be offered free of charge to certain people through a voucher system, and could be provided through credits or reimbursement from employment or unemployment insurance.

(2) Development of life planning programs: Similar to social security programs from cradle to grave, life planning programs from cradle to grave are proposed for an ageing society. Life planning programs need to consider the entire life course; begin earlier in life, at best from infancy; and need to consider major life aspects including finance, health, occupation and career, family and social relations, leisure and hobbies, volunteer or social contribution. In 2015 the Republic of Korea enacted legislation to support life planning for old age, though it is limited to old age. If society could institutionalize life planning programs from the adolescent stage of the life course, it would be a good strategy for individual and population ageing.

(3) IAGG program development in collaboration with UN: IAGG is in a position to develop educational and training programs and life planning programs in collaboration with the United Nations and other international bodies.

5. Conclusion

We at IAGG believe the ageing of society to be a great achievement and blessing for humanity. However, unless we rethink the traditional social welfare model to mitigate the social burden of an ageing population, the achievement of longevity may threaten our future. Therefore, IAGG strongly urges UN Member States to develop effective educational and training programs for persons aged 40 years and over so that we all may enjoy the blessings of longevity in an ageing society.
