



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
1 December 2017  
English  
Original: French

---

## Commission for Social Development

### Fifty-sixth session

31 January–7 February 2018

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:  
priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to  
achieve sustainable development for all**

### **Statement submitted by International Federation of Associations of the Elderly, 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

### Geriatric emergencies: a global priority

The International Federation of Associations of the Elderly decided in 2006 that it was advisable, or even imperative, to establish a branch dedicated to international geriatric emergencies.

The importance of this programme, which assists the elderly in the event of pandemics, earthquakes, natural disasters and wars, was underscored by the monitoring and interventions of the Federation during certain emergency situations, namely, the 6 April 2009 earthquake in the mountainous Italian province of Abruzzo, the 25 April 2015 earthquake in Nepal, the 14 July 2016 Nice attack, the 26 July 2016 Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray attack and the 2017 hurricane season in the Caribbean.

Through its response teams and member associations on various continents, the Federation has observed that the elderly, in particular the most vulnerable among them, suffer more, either directly or indirectly, than other segments of the population in the aftermath of pandemics, natural disasters and acts of war. This problem is exacerbated when local geriatric care is lacking.

The various gerontological systems and training programmes have generally neglected to take this issue into account. In crisis situations, older persons are the most affected and often the least supported and are therefore frequently overlooked in favour of younger populations. They are left to die or wander around injured and lost, having lost their spouses or companions and often without shelter or means of subsistence, which adds to their insecurity and seriously compromises their economic and social inclusion.

The management of post-disaster issues and post-traumatic stress disorder among older populations has never been addressed even though post-disaster trauma, depression and social exclusion have increased.

Given the increasing number of geriatric emergencies, and building on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the Federation is issuing a solemn appeal to the Economic and Social Council to urge the international community to ensure the effective implementation of the plan of action for the Sendai Framework, with the incorporation of the cross-cutting priorities related to geriatric emergencies, including the introduction of crisis-management training tailored to such emergencies and the prevention of psychological trauma. A significant portion of the envisaged programmes will focus on the management of post-traumatic stress disorder, not only among affected populations, but also among those responsible for monitoring or assisting them, as they are also subject to disaster-related stress.

The Federation advocates the adoption of specific programmes, and, like the Sendai Framework for Action, calls for the elderly and persons with disabilities to participate as stakeholders in the development of international geriatric emergency programmes.

In addition, their knowledge, their expertise and their capacity for resilience and mutual assistance should be acknowledged. Their views on proposed measures should be taken into consideration and they should be allowed to take part in the decision-making process in crisis-management programmes that affect them.

On 9 and 10 October 2017, the Federation organized an interregional workshop in Martinique on the theme of “Rights, combating abuse and regional cooperation” in collaboration with the Association Martiniquaise pour l’Age d’Or (Martinique Association for the Promotion of Elderly Well-Being — AMDOR), and the City Hall and the Communal Centre for Social Action of the city of Schoelcher, Martinique.

The workshop took place in a very specific climate, as the Caribbean had recently been hit by a series of devastating hurricanes. Representatives from one of the few retirement homes in Dominica made special trips to inform the Federation of the significant difficulties faced by its residents and staff and of the difficulties related to the partial destruction of the building.

Out of that meeting, the “Schoelcher appeal” was born. This was a decision point document entered into by all stakeholders (associations, institutions and elderly persons) to develop a disaster cooperation strategy.

Following that meeting, a decision was made to send a mission to assess the needs of elderly persons so that the necessary assistance could be arranged within the following months, and to develop a geriatric emergency system with an observatory that would enable the necessary monitoring, early warning signals and actions to prevent and tackle pandemics, climate emergencies and other natural disasters. It would increase integrated health and medico-social cooperation in the Caribbean and strengthen solidarity and cooperation within Caribbean countries.

In the light of observations made in the field, the Federation hopes that a specific mechanism will be established for when disasters affect small island States “owing to their unique and particular vulnerabilities”.

Areas prone to natural disasters are increasing in number with climate change, and those who live there will need to be prepared. Disasters have a significant impact on those with limited mobility and those who are dependent or isolated. We must therefore empower the elderly to prepare themselves, and we must enable, or even require, policymakers and local partners to incorporate them in cross-cutting manner into all programmes. The specific needs of vulnerable older persons should therefore be taken into account in evacuation plans, warning systems, social protection mechanisms and awareness and prevention campaigns.

A main theme of the Economic and Social Council is “eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions through promoting sustainable development”. In order to reach this goal, the ageing of the global population must be taken into account, together with the rise in disasters resulting from multiple violent upheavals, including those with societal and climatic causes, as they increase isolation and poverty among the elderly. Prevention, training and mobilization are the keys to the recommended approach.

In February 2017, the Federation called on the Economic and Social Council to establish as soon as possible a geriatric emergency programme based on observations and best practices from around the world.

---