

Statement by Mr. Luis Alfonso Dávila, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, at the Second World Assembly on Ageing

Madrid, Spain, 8 April 2002

Mr. President,
Honourable Ministers.
Distinguished delegates.
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed a great honour for me to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, at this august gathering, where matters so dear to developing countries will be discussed and agreed upon.

At the outset, I would like to express our gratitude to the Government and people of Spain for their generosity in hosting this historic event, and to acknowledge their crucial leadership demonstrated during the negotiations that took place in New York, which indeed have contributed greatly to find agreement around the documents that will be adopted by this Assembly.

Mr. Chairman,

Ageing in the developing world is a reality that needs to receive great attention from the international community as a whole. Statistics have already established that 80% of the world's population of 6 billion people live in developing countries. By 2050, it is estimated that the total of those aged 60 years and older will double worldwide but actually triple in developing countries concomitant with a sharp decline in birth rates by almost a half. This implies that in addition to all the challenges already faced by developing countries in terms of their development, they will be also confronted to the challenge of meeting the needs of their ageing populations. It is in this context that the Second World Assembly on Ageing marks a watershed for developing countries in terms of their policies on ageing to effectively deal with what is increasingly being referred to as a demographic agequake.

Of particular importance is the fact that unlike many developed countries which benefited from a transition period of 100 years before the doubling of their populations, developing countries will witness an explosion of its older population within twenty five years or less.

Given these stark statistics, the developing countries that constitute the Group of 77 and China have expressed their strong interest in a substantive and realistic outcome of the Second World Assembly on Ageing. Most developing countries participated in the review of the outcome of the First World Assembly on Ageing and are cognisant of the fact that despite the positive aspects of that Plan of Action, the recommendations contained therein were more suited to the needs of developed countries. It is therefore of significant importance that the International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002 is a forward looking document that takes into account the special needs and challenges facing the older population particularly in developing countries.

However, the main objective of the International Plan of Action on Ageing to be adopted, which is to secure that older persons reach that stage in an environment of security and dignity, participating fully in their societies as citizens with equal rights and opportunities, remains as one of the biggest challenges faced by developing countries.

Mr. President,

Given the complexity of the challenges presented by ageing to developing countries, it is of fundamental importance that the issue be incorporated in national and international development agendas.

While we stress the central role played by national governments in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes aimed at older persons, we also emphasise the need for a favourable international environment.

The challenges posed by globalization to developing countries have, without doubt, a profound impact in their ability to respond to the social needs of their populations. The obstacles that still remain to the full participation by developing countries in the global economy translates into increasing poverty and marginalisation, which in turn means less resources available to social programmes specifically directed to older persons. This situation needs to be reversed if we are to guarantee that older persons around the world have equal opportunities and that they enjoy a secure, healthy life as they age.

Therefore it is also crucial for developing countries to be able to deal with problems such as external debt. Likewise, it is essential that develop countries fulfil their commitments on official development assistance and continue supporting the efforts of developing countries through international cooperation.

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Such international cooperation will be a key element in the capacity of developing countries in implementing the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

Mr. President,

The situation of poverty in which many older persons live throughout the developing world makes critical the need to work towards the eradication of poverty and the promotion and protection of their civil, political,

economic, social and cultural rights. Older persons living under foreign occupation also face tremendous challenges and hardships.

Older persons face numerous challenges that need to be addressed in order to ensure their full participation in society. They need to be supported and encouraged in whatever activities they engage in. Many are involved in volunteer work, self help activities, farming and giving practical support to their families and communities.

The contribution of older persons goes unnoticed in many occasions, despite their critical role in providing care and support to their families and communities. This is the case particularly throughout the developing world. Indeed, the advent of the HIV/AIDS pandemic has demonstrated the significant contribution of grandparents, especially grandmothers to the well-being of orphans and in providing care to persons affected by the disease.

Promoting and supporting active lifestyles is an important theme in the International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002. At the same time, the vulnerability of older populations should not be ignored. In many cases, they become victims of mental health problems, poverty related illness, violence and abuse. The needs of the disabled, rural and indigenous elderly could also be marginalized. Similarly, older migrants face specific circumstances that constrain the realisation of their full potential.

It is necessary to advance in the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against older persons, including their gender based manifestations. The International Plan of Action on Ageing contains important provisions in this realm.

Mr. President,

It is crucial that older persons have access to health care services that include protection and social support as well as preventive and rehabilitative care so as to allow them to continue participating fully and productively in their respective societies. This will in turn contribute to realizing the full potential of older persons in economic, social and cultural terms, with long-term benefits to societies as a whole.

The particular situation of older women is also a great concern for members of the Group of 77 and China. It is necessary that health care services and all policies and programmes that have to do with older persons, incorporate a gender perspective so as to make sure that the specific needs and concerns of older women are taken fully into account.

In the Group of 77 and China's view, all these issues are very well reflected in the International Plan of Action, and it is now up to all of us, Governments and the international community, to work towards the implementation of these commitments in order to secure that older persons, particularly in the developing countries, will be able to continue their lives healthy and in dignity, participating and contributing to the development of their countries.

Thank you Mr. President.