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PROBLEMS OF THE ELDERLY AND THE AGED

Draft programme and arrangements for the World Assembly
on the Elderly

Report of the Secretary-General**

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* A/35/50.

** A statement on the administrative and financial implications of the draft programme and arrangements will be issued under the symbol A/35/130/Add.1.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. During the discussions held by the General Assembly at its thirty-third session it was emphasized that all the regions of the world were witnessing an increase in the absolute and relative size of their aging population. This phenomenon, coupled with the increased emphasis on development, has serious social, health and economic implications for societies as a whole and for the aging in particular. It is a topic of growing concern to many developed and developing countries. For this reason, the General Assembly decided to convene a World Assembly on the Elderly in 1982.

2. The draft programme contained in the present report has been prepared in response to paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 33/52 of 14 December 1978, concerning the World Assembly on the Elderly in which the Secretary-General was requested

"to elaborate, in consultation with Member States, the specialized agencies and organizations concerned, and to submit to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session, through the Economic and Social Council, a draft programme for the World Assembly on the Elderly and to make recommendations on the organization and objectives of the World Assembly".

3. The Secretary-General has obtained the views of Member States as well as those of the relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Close consultations have taken place with organizations of the United Nations system and several specialized agencies have provided ideas for the draft programme.

4. There has been a high degree of unanimity in the views expressed by Governments, as well as by agencies and non-governmental organizations, regarding the importance of issues related to aging and about the general features of the World Assembly, to be convened in 1982. The present draft programme makes recommendations on the scope of and the preparatory arrangements for the Assembly, which, it is believed, will fulfil the objectives of the resolution and be in line with the views of Governments, agencies and other bodies concerned. It should be emphasized, however, that in a field so wide-ranging and complex, a great deal more consideration will need to be given to the details of the World Assembly before the arrangements for it can be finalized.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Definition

5. It is widely recognized that the process of aging begins at conception and continues until the death of the biological organism, and that growth and maturation of the organism are related to the early and middle stages of human development. The aging are those in that one third or one fourth of the life-span during which loss and decline - psychological, economical and social - are greatest. Such loss is not always owing to biological forces; it may also be a result of

social, economic, environmental and cultural factors. The word "aging" provides a more adequate description than the terms "elderly" or "aged". It suggests continuing development and change during the later stages of the life-span, rather than a fixed or static period of life. "The aging", therefore, is a term that could best be used to define those sections of the population that have left the middle years of life behind them; the word encompasses several stages of the life-span and a vast range of differences. For practical reasons, however, a statistical definition of old age has been used in demographic studies and analysis and social policies relating to aging. For the purposes of the World Assembly "the aging" are defined as those who are 60 years of age and over.

B. General considerations

6. From a demographic point of view, there will continue to be an increase over the next two decades in the absolute and relative size of the aging population in all regions and most countries of the world. This trend will accelerate in the majority of the less developed countries. If the trend towards lowered birth rates continues, the more developed countries will have even greater proportions of their populations in the old-age category.

7. In 1950, there were approximately 200 million persons 60 years of age and over throughout the world. By 1970, this figure had increased to 307 million. Projections to the year 2000 indicate that this number will increase to nearly 580 million, or by nearly 90 per cent, while the world's population as a whole will increase from 3.7 to 6.2 billion, or by approximately 70 per cent. It is significant to note that, for the more developed regions, the increase in the population as a whole will be 21 per cent from 1970 to 2000, while those aged 60 years and over will increase by 54 per cent. In the developing regions, the proportionate increase of the older population is even more pronounced; while an 88 per cent increase is anticipated for the total population over the same period, the increase of those 60 years and over will be approximately 123 per cent. Furthermore, it should be noted that, in 1970, slightly over half of all persons 60 and over lived in the developing nations, while by 2000, about two thirds of all older persons will live in those countries.

8. The increase in the numbers and proportions of the aging is accompanied by a change in the population's age structure. Declining fertility, for example, is the main factor underlying the declining proportion of children in a population and, by the same token, it increases the proportion of older persons. Thus, according to the medium projections of the United Nations, the population aged less than 15 years in the developing countries is expected to decline from an average of about 42 per cent of the total population in 1970 to an average of about 34 per cent in 2000. At the same time the old-age group will have the highest percentage increase of all the main functional groups within the world's population between 1970 and 2000 and within both the more developed and the less developed regions. The working-age group (15-59 years), represents an increase of 83 per cent for the world as a whole and only 24 per cent for the more developed regions. In the less developed regions, it is 110 per cent. The old-age group 60 years and over represents an increase of 89 per cent for the world

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as a whole, 54 per cent for the developed regions and 123 per cent for the developing regions. The school-age group (5-14 years) represents an increase of 46 per cent for the world, a 4 per cent decrease for the developed regions and a 60 per cent increase for the developing world. Finally, for the pre-school group (0-4 years) the projected increase is 36 per cent for the world, 4 per cent for the developed regions and 43 per cent for the developing regions.

9. Among the many implications of these figures for policy makers is the fact that falling birth rates in particular and also rising life expectancy have combined to push up the average age of the world's population. By 2000 there will be about twice as many people over 60 and over 80 years old as there were in 1970. The rise in life expectancy is mainly the result of very large declines in mortality, particularly in the developing countries. Thus, in the year 2000, the average expectation of life at birth for the world will be 64.4, with 73.6 for the developed countries and 63.0 for the developing countries.

10. It is also important to consider the population 45 years of age and over and its implications for the development of social policies and practices as this age group will represent an increasing proportion of the world's population for the remainder of the twentieth century.

11. There is evidence that, throughout human existence, few individuals have achieved longevity. The attainment of advanced age by the majority of individuals in some countries is, however, an achievement of the twentieth century. The increasing expectation of longevity implies living into stages of life where, under changing world social, economic and value systems, there will be new and as yet unstructured social roles and identities. For the female there is the increased prospect of widowhood and, in many countries of the world, reduced income and greater economic deprivation. Longevity also has implications for the structure of the family. With increased mobility of populations throughout the world, the family is increasingly separated in space as well as in time. In addition, the extension of the family into four and five generations is a twentieth century phenomenon and has implications not only for family roles and responsibilities as related to the aging, but also for social policies in supporting the family to carry out some of its more traditional roles in relation to older family members.

12. In developing regions of the world, the social implications of aging go beyond those of the numbers and proportions of older persons in society. Increasingly urbanization and industrialization are being accompanied by a mass migration of the younger and better educated segments of the rural populations to larger cities. Large numbers of the aging are left in rural areas, increasing their numbers disproportionately and depriving them of traditional resources and social support, particularly from younger family members. Furthermore, such rural areas face difficulties in providing the needed capital and manpower to respond to the social and health requirements of the older population which remains.

13. The above statements indicate that, when trends of population growth, distribution and structure are out of balance with social, economic and environmental factors, the imbalance can, at certain stages of development create additional difficulties for the achievement of sustained development. It is

necessary, therefore, for countries expecting future demographic trends and changes in population structure to take appropriate decisions and measures to minimize or eliminate the negative implications of this phenomenon for development.

14. These examples of demographic inertia, emphasizing the growing aging population, demonstrate that, whatever policies may be formulated, socio-economic development must be accelerated in order to provide for a significant increase in levels of living. Efforts made by developing countries to speed up economic growth must be viewed by the entire international community as a global endeavour to improve the quality of life for all people of the world, supported by a just use of the world's wealth, resources and technology in the spirit of the new economic order.

15. Thus, the proposed 1982 World Assembly on the Elderly is expected to provide a focus for world-wide activities that would reflect the reciprocal rights and obligations of society and of the aging.

C. Identification of the main issues

16. Many Member States suggested in their responses to the Secretary-General's inquiry, that the World Assembly on the Elderly should consider the question of the aging within the broader context of the world's social and economic trends so as to appreciate the complexity of the question and to understand the interrelatedness of aging with the issues of society at large. It was emphasized that the current development efforts of most of the developing countries had only achieved partial success. More emphasis should be given to the provision of "increasing opportunities to all people for a better life", as was indicated in the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade.

17. It was noted that uneven distribution of growth among countries and the existing pattern of economic progress very often tended to bypass the majority of the population. A more human-centred perspective should therefore be considered and increasingly organized around the human factor as both its agent and its beneficiary. Thus, development policies should aim at bringing development to the people and making it more responsive to their needs and should allow for and rely on the fullest possible mobilization and utilization of all available resources, including those of the aging.

18. In addition, many Member States emphasized the humanitarian approach to the question of the aging, thus implying that policy makers, in designing their plans for social and economic development, should consider the preventive measures that would eliminate or at least minimize the undesirable negative implications and consequences of development. The aging affect the developmental process and are affected by it: they are affected socially by significant changes in the family structure, the environment, habits, mores and traditions, among other things. Economically they are affected by urbanization, industrialization,

modernization and mobility. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, their increase in numbers and proportion leads to a greater demand on service delivery systems as well as changes in dependency ratio, savings, investment and consumption patterns among others.

19. Some Member States noted that true development and the participation of the aging, like other population groups, in this process, cannot take place in the absence of national independence and liberation. Colonialism, racism, racial discrimination, apartheid, foreign aggression and occupation and all forms of foreign domination continue to be among the greatest obstacles to the full emancipation and progress of the developing countries and all the people involved.

20. National policies for the aging within the context of social progress and economic development must, of course, be defined by each country within the framework of its own priorities, objectives and plans in accordance with its stage of development. Taking into account the various responses of Member States with regard to the improvement of the well-being of the aging within the context of the entire population, it has seemed advisable to group related issues at the World Assembly under two major topics: humanitarian and developmental. It should be noted however, that these two groups are interdependent and interrelated; humanitarian variables influence development variables and are also influenced by them.

1. Humanitarian issues

21. The humanitarian issues are those related to the specific needs of the aging. Although there are many matters that older persons share in common with all members of the population, certain issues affect their individual characteristics and requirements, and these are the ones it is proposed to group for substantive examination and for the formulation of action programmes at the national, local and city levels, as well as internationally.

22. The humanitarian issues proposed by the majority of Member States in their response to the Secretary-General's inquiry relate to a number of subtopics, such as (a) health, (b) housing and environment, (c) social welfare, (d) income security, (e) education and (f) the family. In order to ensure the optimum design provision and utilization of policies and programmes in these areas, Member States stressed that research and training needs with respect to the above-mentioned topics should be systematically considered.

(a) Health. The aging require a variety of remedial and preventive health and social measures. The enhancement of their functional capacities must be one of the main goals of health care for the aging, and prevention must be considered as an important component of health services throughout the life span.

(b) Housing and environment. In designing housing for the aging, Member States recognized that it must be viewed as more than mere shelter. In addition to its physical component, it has psychological and social significance, which

should be duly taken into account. Particular attention should be given to maintaining, wherever possible, the cohesion of the family unit.

(c) Social welfare. Community-based services - preventive, remedial and developmental - for the aging in both developed and developing countries were emphasized by Member States. They further suggested that such services should support the aging in their usual environments. Certain Member States noted that in some rural areas there was a scarcity of resources and organized social welfare services for all ages. At the same time there were concentrations of the aging in many such areas. They therefore urged that existing formal and informal organizations in those rural areas should consider the special needs of the aging and include them in their present programmes.

(d) Income security. Income security implies an adequate minimum income for the aging, a reasonable replacement of previous earnings and an adjustment of benefit levels that will assure the aging of a share in increasing national productivity and in rising levels of living. Social security schemes have been established in developed countries and in most of the developing countries. Recent attempts have been made in both the developed and the developing countries to strengthen existing systems in order to ensure an adequate minimum income for the aging. Certain Member States emphasized in their replies the importance of establishing national comprehensive social security schemes to cover all sectors of the population, including, in particular, agricultural workers and the self-employed. The financing of social security schemes, however, particularly in the developing countries, deserves careful consideration, since, depending on its design and use, it could either hinder or assist development. An important factor that must be considered is the age structure of the population particularly the size and composition of the inactive population.

(e) Education. The increasing rate of social and technological change and the explosion of knowledge throughout the world have resulted in the need for continuing education of people in their middle and later years and for the retraining of those workers whose skills have become obsolete in their middle years. A number of Member States, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations emphasized that education for people in their later years increased their knowledge and skills and enabled them to participate more fully in the life of their community and society. In addition they emphasized the importance of educating the general population about aging and recommended that such teaching should form part of the national and local educational programmes.

(f) The family. Ways and means of strengthening the role of the aging within the family were consistently emphasized by Member States. There is ample evidence of the high esteem in which older people are held in developing countries. However, increasing trends of industrialization and urbanization and the mobility of the labour force indicate that the traditional concept of the place and relationship of the elderly in the family is undergoing major change. Ways to ensure the vital role of the family and the dignity, status and security of the aging are issues that deserve careful consideration.

23. Action to meet these humanitarian needs are primarily the responsibility of national Governments, city and local authorities and the family. However, action at

the international level is also warranted particularly the sharing of information and technology. The exchange of information and experience at the international level is an effective means of stimulating progress and encouraging the adoption of measures to improve the conditions of the aging. Countries with different political, economic and social systems and cultures and at differing stages of development have benefited from a common knowledge of problems, difficulties and achievements and from solutions worked out jointly. Regional and international research activities, data collection and analysis of all aspects of the conditions of the aging are essential in formulating policies and evaluating progress in this field.

24. Effective programming and project formulation will require an adequate flow of factual information and of relevant experience among and between nations both developed and developing and their international assistance collaborators. A major difficulty in assessing the conditions of the aging at the present time, particularly in the developing countries, is the lack or deficiency of data and indicators to measure their situation as it affects the process of development and is in turn affected by it. The United Nations system, particularly in its technical co-operation programmes, could be instrumental in surmounting this difficulty. Moreover, meetings, seminars and training undertaken by the United Nations system have proved to be most valuable in providing a regional and international exchange of information and experience. Future endeavours could relate to such areas as social security, manpower-training, health-care delivery, etc.

2. Developmental issues

25. Keeping in mind the fact that all aging issues are interrelated and interdependent, the developmental issues should not be considered in isolation and may therefore be defined as those cross-sectional issues which consider the aging within the context of society at large. They are concerned with the role of the aging in the developmental process, particularly in such crucial areas as the relationship between the aging of populations and social and economic development. Action on these issues is primarily the responsibility of national Governments and should be integrated into over-all national development policies. However, as mentioned previously, action at the international level is also warranted to support existing programmes and expand their scope in areas such as research, data collection and analysis, technical co-operation, training and advisory services, including co-ordination with national and regional activities of organizations within the United Nations system, the dissemination and exchange of information and liaison with non-governmental organizations and other groups committed to international assistance in the field of aging. In this respect, activities concerning the aging, particularly at the operational level, could be strengthened, paying special attention to any technical co-operation activities extended within the framework of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the country programming system, and through the regional commissions.

26. The aging of the population, coupled with urbanization and industrialization, is giving rise to critical issues with regard to human resources and social and economic development. Although in some developing countries issues relating to the aging have not as yet arisen to a significant degree within the socio-economic context, with increased industrialization, urbanization and other related social

and economic change, as well as increases in the numbers of the aging and their proportion in the total population, these countries would increasingly face such issues. These situations have numerous and wide-ranging economic and social implications that must be understood and taken into account by planners and policy-makers.

27. The aging of a population may be defined as an increase in the ratio of older adults to younger adults. The world and all its regions are witnessing an aging of their population, and this has serious implications for, inter alia, production, consumption and savings, which in turn affect general economic conditions and policies, especially at times when the aging dependency rate is increasing. In addition, the increasing numbers of older people often have an adverse effect on the development process because, in many countries, they have not been brought into the mainstream of development.

28. The skills of the aging population represent economic and social resources that should not be dispensed with lightly. Many Member States emphasized that the aim of aging policy should be to offer the aging options for retirement from active work or for continuation of work on a full or restricted basis. That would have the added value of contributing to economic development by allowing the continued use of skills that would be expensive and often difficult to duplicate and of reducing the economic social and psychological burdens that an idle aging population might place on society.

29. The aging of the population also has serious implications with regard to social development. The countries of the developing world are undergoing changes in the social sphere more rapidly and in a shorter space of time than was the case with the more developed world. Rural development, new political systems, changes in education, technical and employment needs, advances in communication, medical and nutritional sciences and a wide variety of other changes are under way in the more traditional societies of the developing world in an unprecedented manner. The more developed countries have had many decades and, in some cases, centuries to adapt to such changes; many developing countries have had to cope with them in a relatively few years. In both the developed and the developing world, however, these changes have had striking effects on society as a whole as well as on aging persons themselves.

30. In many countries, including developing countries in particular, rapid social change occurring alongside economic development has resulted in problems, at times severe, in the situation of the major population groups, including the aging. Ways and means of minimizing or negating the negative implications of social change on society were stressed as an important topic of discussion for the World Assembly.

31. Another area within this broad developmental context, which was emphasized by Member States as deserving of priority attention, was the effect of aging populations on integrated rural development. Consistently over the last decade, in international forums and meetings, Member States have stressed the need for rural development. Many rural areas of heavy migration in both developed and developing countries are being depleted of their younger populations and are being left with

populations whose age distribution could be unfavourable to economic development. Thus, in many countries the revitalization of the countryside is a priority goal. Taking this into account, many Member States and non-governmental organizations emphasized the need to investigate possible action programmes that could serve to promote integrated rural development by retraining the older population and using their skills and resources.

32. Finally, Member States and international organizations that responded to the Secretary-General's inquiry suggested that special consideration should be given at the World Assembly on the Elderly to international action and programmes in the field of the aging. Ways should be explored in which the international organizations might render assistance to national programmes which incorporated the aging in the development process. Attention should be given to the types of assistance available from the organizations in the United Nations system, including the training of national personnel, the provision of advisory services upon request, the carrying out of research and technical assistance, the provision of technical information and the direct support of national programmes in that field. The programmes of governmental and non-governmental international organizations should also be examined, as well as bilateral aid programmes and those of foundations and other private agencies, in an effort to develop an understanding of the size and types of technical co-operation resources available.

III. ORGANIZATION AND OBJECTIVES

A. Purposes and objectives

33. The basic purposes to be served by the convening of a World Assembly on the Elderly are set out in general terms in General Assembly resolution 33/52 of 14 December 1978, particularly where the Assembly recognizes:

"The need to call world-wide attention to the serious problems besetting a growing portion of the populations of the world"

and decides to organize a World Assembly in 1982

"as a forum to launch an international action programme aimed at guaranteeing economic and social security to older persons, as well as opportunities to contribute to national development".

34. The brief analysis of the major issues of the aging within the context of development attempted in the preceding section suggests lines along which the purposes and objectives of the proposed World Assembly can be further defined.

35. Although there have always been aged segments of the population, only in the last few decades has the attention of individual nations and the world community been drawn to the social, economic, political and scientific questions raised by the phenomenon of aging. This growing awareness has led to a wealth of scientific knowledge and technological skill that has been analysed, discussed and reviewed in many scientific and technical meetings and congresses sponsored by national Governments and international agencies.

36. The universality of the aging phenomenon and the related serious issues that have been raised in developed and developing countries alike call for governmental and intergovernmental action everywhere. The General Assembly, however, clearly did not wish the 1982 World Assembly to be conceived of as a gathering of scientists for detailed discussions of specialized problems pertaining to the improvement of the physio-biological and socio-cultural aspects of the aging, nor did it suggest the initiation by the United Nations of new research projects on these issues. The World Assembly should rather be conceived of as an important means of stimulating and providing guidelines for action by national Governments and international organizations in their attempts to achieve concrete solutions to the various issues related to aging.

37. The main objective of the World Assembly, as indicated in General Assembly resolution 33/52, would be to launch an international action programme aimed at guaranteeing economic and social security to older persons, as well as opportunities to contribute to national development.

38. With this object in mind, the purposes of the World Assembly could be described as follows:

(a) To focus the attention of Governments on the various issues of aging in designing policies and programmes for economic and social development in both developed and developing countries;

(b) To provide an international forum for an exchange of views among Governments on the ways and means of dealing with issues of the aging, including the machinery required for administrative and legislative actions;

(c) To identify aspects of various issues and consider methods to meet the need for action at the national, regional and international level and to consider, in particular, how countries can, through increased international co-operation, derive benefit from the knowledge and experience already acquired regarding the various issues of the aging;

(d) To focus attention on and encourage wider participation in and support for present and future activities and programmes of United Nations organizations and other international organizations related to aging and to give them guidelines and directions.

39. A number of additional objectives might be included in the World Assembly's programme, among which could be mentioned the adoption of certain basic premises and considerations to guide the action of Governments and intergovernmental organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations, institutions and individuals, with regard to the question of aging. Such premises could include the recognition that policies on aging are essential in order to assure the increasing numbers and proportions of older persons of their basic human rights - full participation in and contribution to, as well as protection in, the society of which they are a part. In this connexion, the World Assembly may wish to consider including in the international action programme measures to strengthen the implementation of existing instruments and programmes and to broaden and place them in a more timely context. This would help to stimulate national and international action to meet the needs and resolve the issues relating to aging, particularly the two major groups of issues - humanitarian and developmental - dealt with in section I.C above. Furthermore, policies on the aging are essential to ensure that the international action programme is optimally responsive and effective and is used to the maximum extent possible. In the light of the consultations with Member States, it is suggested that the World Assembly on the Elderly may wish to consider a declaration on the rights of the elderly, which could be advantageously used as a common basis and a frame of reference for the development of national policies.

40. Although the primary emphasis of the World Assembly will be on action, importance must be given to the provision of information regarding the significance of the issues of aging, since on this will depend the support needed for effective action. The necessary steps should therefore be taken before, during and after the World Assembly to bring to public attention the issues, deliberations and recommendations of the World Assembly.

B. Scope

41. With the above purposes and objectives in mind, the World Assembly should not be involved in narrow technical discussions, but should address itself to broad topics of general human concern. In other words, it should principally consider the effects of the aging on economic, social and cultural development and how this development in its turn affects the aging. The concentration of the World Assembly on issues leading to action will automatically leave aside those aspects of the problems which do not call for or are not amenable to such action. Topics of interest, no matter how great their theoretical importance, should not be considered unless they can conceivably lead to an action programme.

C. Participation

42. To secure the objectives of the World Assembly, it is important that delegations should be at the policy-making level and be representative of a wide range of disciplines, such as statistics, health, welfare, education, economics, population, planning, housing, public administration, urbanization and rural development and that this should include experts in the biological and social sciences, economics, education, information, health, population, welfare, housing and planning. The major emphasis, however, should be placed on the interdisciplinary aspects of the issues, and areas of broad concern should be underlined.

43. The specialized agencies, which will be closely associated with all stages of the preparation of the World Assembly, will be represented.

44. In addition, appropriate intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations will be invited to assist in the preparation and to participate in the Assembly.

D. Duration and timing

45. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 33/52, the World Assembly is to be held in 1982. Unless decided otherwise by the General Assembly, a special conference is normally held where the substantive department or office responsible for servicing the conference is located. Therefore, and without prejudice to any invitation which may be extended by a Member State to act as host to the World Assembly, the Secretary-General proposes that it be held in the latter half of 1982, for a duration of two weeks, at Vienna, where the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs is located.

E. Documentation

46. A basic principle deriving from the above general approach is that the World Assembly will have a limited number of working documents prepared for it in advance, relating to the various issues and types of action included in its programme. In addition, the World Assembly will have before it material prepared

by the specialized agencies and other international organizations. The documentation envisaged for the World Assembly will thus include:

(a) Working documents. In order to set the framework of the World Assembly in the first plenary session, two introductory papers will be prepared. These introductory papers will, in particular, take into account the main conclusions deriving from national reports and reports of regional meetings (see para. 48 below). A number of discussion papers will be prepared for each of the main topics selected for the programme.

(b) Reports contributed by interested specialized agencies and international organizations

47. In addition, each country will be invited to prepare a national report which will analyse, preferably in accordance with a uniform general outline, the main issues, both humanitarian and developmental with which it has to deal, the ways in which they are handled and the experience acquired in this respect. Copies of national reports could be made available to the Secretariat well in advance so that their content could be analysed and used in the preparation of the working documents. These national reports will not be translated or published, but could be distributed by the delegations at the time of the Assembly or made available to other countries beforehand.

F. Official languages

48. It is suggested that the official languages of the World Assembly should be those of the General Assembly (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).

G. Preparatory work

49. Preparations must begin as early as possible in order to ensure full participation in and preparation for the Assembly by Member States.

50. In the preparations for and the organization of the World Assembly, the Secretary-General would welcome the assistance of an advisory intergovernmental body. He would therefore like to suggest that an advisory committee be established by the General Assembly to assist in the formulation of a draft international action programme for the elderly. The committee would also advise on such matters as the provisional agenda, programme and organization of the World Assembly, the preparation of working documents, on the draft rules of procedure and on the outcome of the work of the panel of experts on development and aging (see para. 48 below). The committee should have a limited membership (23 Member States) composed of representatives and experts familiar with the subject and appointed on the basis of equitable geographical distribution. A membership of 23 States would be in line with the composition of the Advisory Committee on the International Year of Disabled Persons and of the Advisory Committee on the International Youth Year.

51. The Secretary-General would like to propose that a panel of experts be convened in order to provide an opportunity to consider the question of the aging in the context of development needs. A report on development and aging would be prepared by the Secretariat for submission to the panel of experts. That report, after review by the panel, is expected to offer a basis for discussion at a series of regional meetings on aging and development which the Secretary-General proposes to convene in collaboration with the regional commissions. The regional meetings would also afford an opportunity to obtain regional inputs to other preparatory work for the Assembly, with the result that thematic substantive discussions might be held during the Assembly, as regional variations would already have been taken into account in the preparatory work.

52. The Secretary-General would designate the Assistant Secretary-General for Social Development and Humanitarian Activities as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to be in charge of the organization of the World Assembly. The Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Activities would have the substantive responsibility for the World Assembly and would function as its secretariat. In order for the Centre to discharge its responsibilities, the resources of the Centre would need to be strengthened.

53. Many specialized agencies are directly involved in major sectors of the issues to be discussed at the World Assembly. Their full participation will be essential at all stages of preparation of the Assembly, including participation in the meetings of the Advisory Committee. Consideration should be given to establishing an ad hoc interagency task force to ensure the co-ordination of inputs of the agencies to the preparations for the World Assembly. It is hoped that some of the agencies which are particularly concerned with a broad area of the subject-matter of the World Assembly will be able to assign staff members to serve as focal points to ensure full co-operation and co-ordination with the United Nations Secretariat.

54. Preparations for the World Assembly in the countries themselves should also begin immediately. For this purpose, it is suggested, as a first step, that countries should be invited to establish ad hoc committees or similar focal points in the governmental machinery to ensure appropriate liaison within the country and to facilitate contacts with the secretariat.

55. The detailed financial implications of the proposals outlined above will be submitted as an addendum to the present report.

56. The Secretary-General will submit to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session a report on the work of the proposed advisory committee, together with the draft provisional agenda, the draft rules of procedure and the proposed organization of the World Assembly on the Elderly, as well as on other matters relating to the preparations for the World Assembly.
