

UN ISSUES 'AGE-FRIENDLY CITIES' GUIDE TO BOTH HELP AND TAP VALUE OF OLDER PEOPLE

New York, Oct 1 2007 11:00AM

The United Nations today marked the International Day of Older Persons with appeals for sustainable pension programmes and the release of the first guide on age-friendly cities, recommending a range of measures from well-lit sidewalks to bus drivers' waiting until senior citizens are seated before starting off.

"Sobering statistics show that some 80 per cent of the world's population are not covered by social protection in old age," Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon <<http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=2774>>said in a message marking the Day. Finding ways to provide economic support for a growing number of older persons, through sustainable pension programmes and new social protection measures, is a daunting task, particularly in developing countries.

"Our views on what it means to be old are changing all the time. Where older persons were sometimes seen as a burden on society, they are now increasingly recognized as an asset that can and should be tapped," he added, noting that population ageing brings significant economic and social challenges for developed and developing countries alike.

The growing proportion of older people in the global population is predicted to double from 11 per cent in 2006 to 22 per cent in 2050, with the trend occurring at a much faster rate in the developing world where the number is about twice that in developed countries. By 2050, some 80 per cent of older people will be living in less developed regions.

In Asia and the Pacific alone, the rapidly growing number of older persons is projected to reach 733 million in 2025 and 1.3 billion in 2050 from 410 million this year - 15 per cent of the total population in 2025 and nearly 25 per cent by 2050 from over 10 per cent now.

With more than half of the global population already urban dwellers, a proportion that is expected to reach three out of every five people by 2030, the UN World Health Organization (<[http://www.who.int/ageing/events/idop\\_rationale/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/ageing/events/idop_rationale/en/index.html)>WHO) today released "Global age-friendly cities: a guide," based on consultations with older people in 33 cities in 22 countries on key physical, social and services needs.

"Age-friendly cities benefit people of all ages, not just older people, and WHO is committed to disseminating and promoting the implementation of the guide worldwide," WHO Assistant Director-General for Family and Community Health Daisy Mafubelu said of the consultations carried out in Istanbul, London, Melbourne, Mexico City, Moscow, Nairobi, New Delhi, New York, Rio de Janeiro, Shanghai and Tokyo among other centres.

Guide recommendations include: sufficient well-situated public benches and clean public toilets accessible for people with disabilities; well-maintained, well-lit sidewalks; public buildings fully accessible to people with disabilities; and bus drivers who wait until older people are seated before starting off, and priority seating on buses.

Other steps include enough reserved parking spots for people with disabilities; housing integrated in the community that accommodates changing needs and abilities as people grow older; friendly, personalized service and information instead of automated answering services; easy-to-read information in plain language; public and commercial services and stores in neighbourhoods close to where people

live rather than concentrated outside the city; and a civic culture that respects and includes older persons.

"Older people are concentrated in cities and will become even more so," WHO Ageing and Life Course Programme Director Alex Kalache said. "Today around 75 per cent of all older people living in the developed world are urban dwellers - expected to increase to 80 per cent in 2015. More spectacularly, in developing countries the number of older people in cities will increase from 56 million in 2000 to over 908 million in 2050."

Meanwhile, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (<" <http://www.unescap.org/unis/index.asp>">UNESCAP) announced it will bring together representatives from 25 regional countries to a high-level meeting in Macao, China, from 9 to 11 October to review progress made in response to the challenges of population ageing.

"Now is the time to address the challenges and opportunities of ageing and empower older persons," UN Population Fund (<" <http://www.unfpa.org/news/news.cfm?ID=1037>">UNFPA) Executive Director Thoraya Obaid said in a message marking the Day. "UNFPA urges all countries to recognize the great potential that the elderly offer and to tap into their wisdom, strength, courage and resourcefulness.

"By instituting policies and programmes that support the well-being of persons of all ages, Governments, civil society and the private sector can create a society for all," she added.

2007-10-01 00:00:00.000