



## SIXTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

**Outcome of United Nations conferences****(a) The Second World Assembly on Ageing  
(Madrid, 8-12 April 2002)****1. Introduction**

1. In March 2002, the Committee on Employment and Social Policy discussed the ILO contribution to the Second World Assembly on Ageing. This document informs the Governing Body of the work of the ILO delegation to the Assembly and summarizes the main outcomes having significance for future ILO work. The United Nations General Assembly, at its 54th Session, decided to convene the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the First World Assembly which was held in Vienna in 1982. The Government of Spain hosted the Assembly in Madrid, from 8 to 12 April 2002.<sup>1</sup> Its objective was to respond to the opportunities and challenges of a rapidly ageing population – a demographic revolution without precedent – and to promote the development of a “society for all ages”, the theme of the 1999 International Year of Older Persons.
2. The Assembly organized its work around the plenary and the main committee. The plenary allowed for a general exchange of views on the main themes, while the main committee was responsible for preparing the two outcome documents. The Government of Spain sponsored a series of high-level round-table discussions entitled “Dialogues 2020: The future of ageing”, which involved independent experts and eminent personalities. A parallel side events programme which encompassed panel discussions, workshops, meetings and cultural exhibitions was organized by United Nations agencies, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental bodies and member States. In opening the Assembly, Infanta Doña Cristina of Spain congratulated the United Nations for the excellent work done on the Assembly and noted the importance of building a positive image of ageing, not only as an extension of life, but to ensure that old age is healthy and fully integrated in society.
3. The United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Annan, urged world leaders to engage all relevant actors in effective coalitions to face the challenges of the world’s rapidly ageing

<sup>1</sup> The official web site of the Assembly is [www.madrid2002-envejecimiento.org](http://www.madrid2002-envejecimiento.org) .

populations. He stressed that ageing was definitely no longer just a “first world issue” and mentioned the following challenges that we are facing: (i) as more and more people move to cities, older persons are losing traditional family support and social networks and are increasingly at risk of marginalization; (ii) HIV/AIDS is forcing many older people in developing countries to care for children orphaned by the disease; and (iii) in developed countries, the concept of cradle-to-grave security is disappearing. The shrinking size of the working population means that older people are more at risk of inadequate pensions and medical attention.<sup>2</sup>

4. The Assembly elected Mr. Aznar, President of the Government of Spain, as President of the Second World Assembly on Ageing. Mr. Aznar said that countries must increasingly promote “active” ageing through policies of preventive medicine, continued learning and a flexible work schedule. He also stressed that a country that fails to offer opportunities for its older people to actively participate is a country missing opportunities.

## 2. The outcome

5. The Assembly adopted two outcome documents – the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002 and the Political Declaration.<sup>3</sup> Both outcome documents gather the governments’ commitments to take initiatives in three priority directions: older persons and development; advancing health and well-being into old age; and ensuring enabling and supportive environments.
6. The ILO delegation’s input, mainly on issues related to employment and social protection are reflected in important sections of the outcome documents.
7. The Political Declaration encourages the international community to further promote cooperation among all actors involved. To tackle the challenges associated with ageing, the Declaration also underlines the importance of international research on age-related matters, access to education and training programmes, the empowerment of older persons, and the need to create opportunities for older persons to continue working as long as they wished. The Declaration notes that effective collaboration between governments, international organizations, older persons and their organizations, and other parts of civil society and the private sector is essential. It also underlines the important role of the United Nations, in assisting countries in the implementation, follow-up and national monitoring of the Plan.
8. The Madrid Plan calls for changes in attitudes, policies and practices in all sectors to realize the enormous potential of ageing. According to the text, all older persons should be able to age with security and dignity, and continue to take part in society as citizens with full rights.
9. The first priority direction of the Plan, entitled “older persons and development”, focuses on eight issues which call for urgent action to ensure the continuing integration and empowerment of older persons. Employment and social protection issues are included in this first priority direction under the following headings: (i) work and the ageing labour force; (ii) access to knowledge, education and training; and (iii) income security, social protection/social security and poverty alleviation. This section of the Plan emphasizes the

<sup>2</sup> The text of the address by the Secretary-General is available at [www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/sgsm8188.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/sgsm8188.doc.htm) .

<sup>3</sup> Both documents are available at [www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/waa/](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/waa/) .

importance of implementing Commitment 3 of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development on promoting the goal of full employment, and recommends to place employment growth at the heart of macroeconomic policies. It also notes the importance of implementing policies to ensure lifelong education and training, as continuing education and training are essential to ensure the productivity of both individuals and nations. Regarding income security and social protection/social security measures, the Plan states that they are part of a foundation for economic prosperity and social cohesion, and it encourages the promotion of programmes to enable all workers to acquire basic social protection/social security. The Plan places high priority to gender issues. It notes that factors affecting older women in the labour market deserve special attention and that appropriate social protection/social security measures are required to address the feminization of poverty, in particular among older women.

10. The key message, as put forward by the ILO to the Assembly was that a genuine solution to the challenge of ageing is to be sought by increasing participation in the labour force and thus through job creation. The ILO emphasized that many of the concerns raised over the financing of social security systems are based on the assumption that growth will not create enough jobs for everybody and that consequently there will be fewer people contributing to the social security system, and an increasing number seeking to benefit from its services for a longer period of time. The ILO stressed that we should not be thinking in terms of distributing the jobs currently available in a world of growing unemployment, but of creating more and better jobs.
11. The ILO also noted the important resource that older people represent and that they should have the opportunity to pursue productive activities, either paid or unpaid which keep them connected with society. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of banishing the stigma of “retired” that in a very unfair manner associates a deserved rest at the end of the working life with the definite marginalization from social life.
12. The ILO message was well received by delegations attending the Assembly as reflected in their deliberations during the Assembly and in the subsequent outcome documents. Furthermore, both national and international press gave comprehensive coverage of the abovementioned issues. For the ILO, the major achievement of this Second World Assembly has been to put decent work at the centre of the world debate on ageing issues.
13. During the closing ceremony, the Under Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Desai, highlighted the important contribution of the ILO in the preparatory process of the Assembly as well as during the Assembly and urged the delegates to actively involve these specialized agencies in the follow-up activities.

### **3. ILO action at the Assembly**

14. The ILO delegation was headed by the ILO Director-General and comprised officials from the Social Protection and Employment Sectors, the Bureau for External Relations and Partnerships as well as the Department of Communication.
15. The ILO contributed to the Assembly with a written report entitled “An inclusive society for an ageing population: Employment and social protection issues”, which was prepared by the Employment and Social Protection Sectors of the ILO. The report considers a set of

employment and social protection issues that need to be addressed if “a society for all ages” is to become a reality.<sup>4</sup>

16. The ILO also organized a side event on employment and social protection issues related to older workers and population ageing and participated in several panels and round tables.

### 3.1. Statement of the Director-General

17. The ILO Director-General delivered a statement on Tuesday, 9 April 2002, during the general exchange of views in the plenary session. Mr. Somavia noted that the main reason for the World Assembly was to celebrate one of humanity’s great successes: the increase in life expectancy of men and women. He said that there were four crucial issues to address. The first was that longevity presented us with a great opportunity, not an intractable problem. The second critical fact was that old age must be approached through integrated policies that can help people throughout their lives and contribute to strengthening the family. Thirdly, full employment in decent working conditions was a viable and productive way to meet the challenges of ageing. Fourthly, the chance to prolong one’s working life was a promising alternative for society and deserved to be an option for older persons who wished to do so. Finally, he noted the importance of banishing the stigma of the word “retired” which in a very unfair manner associated a deserved rest at the end of the working life with the definite marginalization from social life.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.2. Round-table discussions

18. Under the theme: “Dialogues 2020: The future of ageing”, a series of round-table discussions constituted a substantive part of the parallel acts agenda of the Assembly. On Monday, 8 April 2002, the Director-General participated in a round-table discussion entitled “Development in an ageing world: Implications of ageing in poverty eradication and development strategies”. Ambassador Pérez de Cuellar chaired the round table and Ms. Tsao (board member of Help Age International) was the keynote speaker. Other participants included Ms. Obaid (Director-General of the United Nations Population Fund), Mr. Iglesias (Director-General of the Inter-American Development Bank) and Mr. Cortés (Spain’s Secretary of State for Technical Cooperation).
19. Ms. Tsao stressed the need to ensure that the vast potential that older people have is properly valued and rewarded. She also noted that we must end the situation whereby older people are excluded from work and prevented from benefiting from the fruits of economic progress. Mr. Somavia said that it is crucial that we tackle the ageing issues in the context of the family and stressed that the key to deal with problems related to ageing is “full employment”. He emphasized that full employment is not only an economic goal but also a social one. He also stressed that social security solutions should not be based on static thinking. They need to be sought in a dynamic context. The goal should not be to distribute current jobs but to create more and better jobs.

<sup>4</sup> The report is available at [www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/news.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/news.htm) .

<sup>5</sup> The video and the text of his statement are available at [www.un.org/ageing/coverage/state9.htm](http://www.un.org/ageing/coverage/state9.htm) .

### 3.3. ILO panel discussion

20. On Wednesday, 10 April 2002, the Social Protection and Employment Sectors organized a panel discussion entitled: “Older workers and population ageing: Employment and social protection issues”. The Executive Directors of the ILO’s Employment and Social Protection Sectors, Mr. Hultin and Mr. Diop, presented a set of employment and social protection issues that need to be addressed if a “society for all ages” is to become a reality. The panel was chaired by Mr. Díaz Guerra, Deputy Secretary of Labour and Social Affairs from Spain and included the participation as panellists of Mr. Montalvo, President of the Economic and Social Council from Spain, and Mr. Díaz de Rivera, Deputy Secretary of Social and Human Development from Mexico. Based on the report prepared by the ILO the panel discussion covered: (i) the role of employment and social protection systems to eradicate poverty and social exclusion; (ii) the importance of “employability” and “workability” policies to enable older people to remain integrated in the economy and the society; and (iii) the crucial role of social protection systems to ensure a decent old age and the importance of devising systems which can reach all women and men.

### 3.4. Media and communication strategy

21. The ILO received extensive media coverage at the national and international level. In a press briefing at the Assembly, the Director-General urged global actors to create employment opportunities for their ageing populations and stressed the importance of removing the stigma from notions of old age and retirement. Numerous articles highlighting the ILO’s approach could be found during the week of the Assembly in the main Spanish newspapers, *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia* and *ABC* (copies available on request).
22. Two information stands were set up by the Employment and Social Protection Sectors offering numerous ILO publications as well as information on ILO-related events during the Assembly. Both stands were very well attended and a press kit entitled “Facing the ageing gap: New-age solutions to old-age problems” as well as a press release were widely distributed. The ILO also collaborated with the United Nations Department of Public Information on the United Nations press kit for the Assembly which included an article on the ILO entitled “Decent jobs: Social inclusion and social protection”.

## Conclusions

23. The occasion of the Assembly and the outcomes it agreed served to bring together a range of policy issues that bear upon the well-being of older women and men and their role in society. The ILO can take some satisfaction from having contributed significantly to the process and will be able to make extensive use of the Madrid outcomes to support its ongoing work regarding older workers.

Geneva, 7 October 2002.

*Submitted for information.*