

## THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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### MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS

1 October 2004

The theme of this year's International Day of Older Persons -- "Older Persons in an Intergenerational Society"-- recognizes the important role that older persons play in their families, communities and societies. On this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Year of the Family, the theme also recognizes that the youth of today, who constitute the largest group of young people ever, will be the older persons of the year 2050. They will make up the largest group of older persons ever.

Yet in many places, both young and old remain excluded from meaningful participation in their societies, and the tremendous contribution they could make towards society's development is often ignored. Older persons suffer because of outdated stereotypes that depict them as frail and needing care. What is overlooked is that many older persons, far from receiving care, actually provide care for others – as with grandparents who care for grandchildren while the parents go to work. In some places, especially in the developing world, what was a temporary arrangement has in many cases become permanent; the "middle generation" of parents is absent, having migrated in search of employment, or died as a result of HIV/AIDS or other diseases.

Populations in developing countries will age most rapidly in the coming century. Yet those countries have only limited economic resources with which to respond to the ageing of their societies. The challenge will be to ensure that those countries do not experience the ageing of their societies as a burden, but derive from it added value and opportunities for development through an actively engaged older population. In other words, the challenge will be helping those countries build an intergenerational society.

The Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in Madrid two years ago, marked a turning point in our thinking. The Assembly recognized ageing as a global phenomenon and supported its inclusion in the international development agenda. Among its many recommendations, the Madrid Plan of Action encouraged Governments to review policies to ensure generational equity, and to promote the idea of mutual support and solidarity between generations as key elements of social development. Only in this way can we hope to build a truly intergenerational society. On this International Day, let us rededicate ourselves to that mission.