

# VOICE

REPRESENTATIVE ORGANIZATION OF OLDER PEOPLE IN BELIZE

**WE OLDER PEOPLE HAVE MUCH TO SAY  
SO PLEASE LISTEN TO US AND RESPECT  
OUR CONCERNS**

We want to be respected and acknowledged by society

We want pensions for all older people

We want safe housing

We want recreation facilities to exercise

We want to eat nutritional food to stay healthy

We want adequate, appropriate & affordable medication



H O P E



Sponsored by Belizean High Commission & National Council on Aging Tel: 501-822-1546

Photography provided courtesy of Helping Older People Equally, Toledo.



A cooperative effort by the NGO Committee on Ageing and  
Global Action on Aging

### Section I

I. What has the NGO done to educate older persons and/or the general public about the Madrid Plan?

**Answer:** The National Council on Ageing (NCA) is a quasi-government organization established in February 2003 by the Belize Government as a response to the implementation of the National Policy for Older Persons, passed through cabinet in June 2002. It has an 18 member board of which there are 5 NGO representative members and 2 older persons representatives. The other members are representatives from Government (5), PAHO, Business, Church and the Social Security Board

The National Policy for Older Persons presents 9 priority areas for action:

- 1: National Mechanism
- 2: Education and Media
- 3: Health & Nutrition
- 4: Social Welfare
- 5: Income Support
- 6: Family
- 7: Housing & Environment
- 8: Legal
- 9: Research

The NCA works through the *National Plan of Action for Older Persons (2003-2008)*, which has elaborated on the areas stipulated above plus the inclusion of:

- 10: HIV/AIDS and
- 11: National Disaster Preparedness & Management. .

Since 2003 the NCA has been working to implement the National Policy through the NPAOP and using the NCA Strategic Plan.

**N.B:** Through brochures, fact sheets, workshops and the use of the media, the NCA promotes all the issues of concern to older persons and, as a point of interest, indicates the importance of the Madrid International Plan of Action as a catalyst for all action on ageing.

### Section II

II. Which of the 3 priority directions of Madrid Plan (older persons and development; advancing health and well-being into old age; ensuring enabling and supportive environments) is the principal focus of the NGO?

**Answer:** The NCA does not have a principal focus for the Madrid Plan of Action but works on all area mentioned above.

If we were to narrow this list down I think we are consistently tackling issues relating to:

- 1: Income security and increased pension provision to cover all older persons in Belize,
- 2: The need for better health care through the availability of appropriate and affordable medication.
- 3: Inclusion of Older person in society.

III. What specific accomplishments has the NGO achieved in that area? How has it worked with government, other NGO's and/or others to achieve its objectives?

Answer: 1: (a) The NCA has recently carried out a survey in conjunction with the Belize Social Security Board / Ministry of Human Development of older persons as recipients of Social Assistance from GOB /Social Security of \$10.00 per week (\$5.00 GOB & \$5.00 BSSB) and the Non-Contributory Pension for Women of \$75.00 per month, which indicates that all older persons receiving these benefits live below the poverty line.  
It has been important to identify the seriousness of this issue if the NCA is to take action to alleviate the poverty situation as per adherence of Millennium Development Goals.

(b) The NCA Medical Committee is awaiting a visit to Jamaica under a Technical Cooperation Programme funded by PAHO to find out how their 'Drugs for the Elderly Programme' works and if it is possible to introduce it in Belize. A member of the Ministry of Health is represented on this committee and would be responsible for any future negotiations in this respect along with the NCA.

2: Working with Belize Social Security Board and Ministry of Health regarding the introduction of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHI), the co-payment charge for Older Persons has been waived and so older persons no longer pay for medication available at clinics and pharmacies operating through the NHI scheme. However, this is not available countrywide as yet but hopefully by the end of 1008.

3: With the support and encouragement of the NCA, a representative group of older persons has been formed called VOICE.

In 2006 the NCA held a 2 day forum entitled 'The Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Older Persons' which was facilitated by 2 consultants from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). The older persons who participated identified many areas of concern but felt that they needed to be part of the process to make changes. Having obtained a small grant from the British High Commission in Belize, the NCA invited key persons willing to contribute their time and energy to forming a new organization – hence VOICE was born. Although still in its fledgling stage it is hoped that it will be launched officially as an NGO in October.

(A copy of their poster will be emailed along with his report)

- IV. Every Government has been asked by the UN, but is not required, to conduct a "bottom-up" review and appraisal during 2007 of progress in their country in implementing the Madrid Plan. To your knowledge, has your government begun or committed to undertake that review? If yes, has your NGO been invited to participate? If so, how?

**Answer:** I am unaware that the Government of Belize has been asked to undertake a review of the progress in implementing the Madrid Plan.

We have 3 UN offices in Belize and I can ask UNDP and UNFPA if they are aware of this request. I do not think that UNICEF would know about this.

If the request were to land on my desk I would undertake the review on behalf of the Government.

Please note that although you ask for 3 priority areas of work covered by the NCA it does address all issues of concern to older persons.

The NCA is the advocating mechanism that seeks to raise awareness of the issues in order for everyone to be part of the process of change.

Each year we have held Forums / Seminars and countrywide training sessions to raise awareness and develop the capacity of older persons and organizations working with older persons.

**Future Plans:**

1: The NCA plans this year is to employ the services of a lawyer to draft an Older Persons Act, which will provide increased legal protection for older persons and when aware of this, less likely to be taken advantage of by having their land and homes taken away from them.

2: Through working with VOICE, the NCA will embark upon a regular radio programme for older persons, which will take issues out to the wider community audience.

3: Inter-generational projects have always been an issue and this will be tackled in a more constructive way this year by the NCA Education Committee through a new story telling programme.

As far as possible the NCA works alongside older persons by including them in activities that raise awareness. For example, when asked to participate in radio and television programmes, older persons are asked to contribute their thoughts, ideas and participation.

It must be emphasized that the NCA does not speak for older persons because we acknowledge their ability to be able to do this for themselves.