

Summary Report on the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing

By Susan Aziz, INPEA North American Regional Representative

Based on the theme of Building a Society for All Ages, the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing was held in Madrid, Spain from April 8-12, 2002. Its main objective was to adopt a revised version of the 1982 International Plan of Action on Ageing, including a long-term strategy on aging. Participants included the national delegations of the 189 UN Member States, as well as representatives of UN agencies, designated international organizations and accredited Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) attending as observers. Officers and Regional Representatives of the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA), a UN-accredited NGO, attended as observers.

After four days of heated debate on issues linked to the impact of the aging of the world's population, the International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002, which includes actions to eliminate "neglect, abuse and violence," was adopted by consensus by the delegates. The Plan is accompanied by a Political Declaration which outlines shared principles of how to adjust to the expected boom in the elderly population over the next 50 years. Both are available on the UN Programme on Ageing website at www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/waa/index.html.

The Honorable Josefina Carbonell, Assistant Secretary for Aging, United States Department of Health and Human Services, led the US Delegation. Her speech at the Plenary Session of the World Assembly highlighted the commitment of the US to protecting elders from abuse, neglect and exploitation. Her speech is available at www.aoa.gov and at www.un.org/ageing/coverage/usaE.htm.

"There has been a strong focus on human rights and elder abuse," asserted Mr. Nitin Desai, the UN Under Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs who headed the 2002 World Assembly. "Before, we hardly even talked about it." Indeed, at the first World Assembly in Vienna, Austria in 1982, elder abuse was not part of the agenda or mentioned in the International Plan of Action. During the intervening twenty years, the research on elder abuse has advanced significantly. With growing awareness of elder abuse as a worldwide phenomenon and increasing reports of abuse, the need for research, education, training, policy, evidence-based practice, advocacy and theory building is acute.

A report on abuse of older persons, released by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan weeks before the World Assembly, contributed to the discussions at two related events at which INPEA had a prominent role--the Valencia Forum and World NGO Forum on Ageing--and at the World Assembly. The report is available on the UN website, www.un.org/ageing.

The Valencia Forum, held April 1-4 in Valencia, Spain, engaged a range of the world's leading researchers, educators and practitioners in aging who provided presentations, engaged in lively exchanges, and collaborated in crafting recommendations important to the World Assembly deliberations. The Valencia Forum Report and the Research Agenda on Ageing for the 21st Century, produced and submitted to the World Assembly for distribution to delegates, focuses on key issues including "neglect, abuse and violence". This document, as well as the book of abstracts

and keynote addresses from the Forum, is available at www.valenciaforum.com/vfr.html. The Valencia Forum website now offers the Valencia Forum Dialogues interactive bulletin boards to provide the opportunity for continuing debate and discussion on the outcomes of the Forum and on the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

At the World NGO Forum on Ageing, held April 5-9 in Madrid, approximately 600 NGOs met in order to influence the World Assembly's agenda and recommendations, as well as share ideas about advocacy and program activities. This forum led to the production of the "Final Declaration and Recommendations of the World NGO Forum on Ageing: Development and Rights of the Elderly" that calls for "protection against abuse, violence and ill-treatment at all levels: local, national and international." The final document is available on the website at www.conferenceofngos.org.

INPEA was privileged to participate in all three events. The rising tide of worldwide interest in elder abuse was evidenced, in part, by the high attendance and active exchanges at sessions convened by INPEA and by INPEA in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) at the Valencia and NGO Forums. AARP also convened an excellent session on elder abuse at the NGO Forum. Colleagues condemned violence against older persons as an infringement of their most basic human rights. Eager to find solutions, INPEA National Representatives and others shared stories of harrowing neglect, abuse and exploitation in such countries as Kenya, South Africa, Peru, Thailand, India, Canada and the United States.

The WHO/INPEA document, "Missing Voices: Views of Older Persons on Elder Abuse", was widely disseminated at the three events. "Missing Voices" is based on a study exploring elder abuse from the perspective of older adults and primary health care workers cross-culturally. This study, conducted through a collaborative partnership between WHO, INPEA, HelpAge International and several academic institutions, was the first step in the ongoing development of a global strategy for the prevention of elder abuse. "Missing Voices" can be found at www.who.int/hpr/ageing/elderabuse and on the INPEA website. (DAN, PLEASE FILL IN)

The International Plan of Action on Ageing specifies 11 important actions aimed at eliminating all forms of neglect, abuse and violence against older persons and creating support services to reduce elder abuse. See Figure 1 for a Summary. ADD BOX WITH THE FOLLOWING:

Summary of Actions: Neglect, Abuse and Violence

Eliminate all forms of neglect, abuse and violence of older persons

- ❖ Educate professionals and the public
- ❖ Abolish widowhood rites, harmful to women
- ❖ Enact legislation
- ❖ Eliminate harmful traditional practices involving older persons
- ❖ Encourage cooperation between government and civil society
- ❖ Minimize risks of abuse to older women
- ❖ Encourage research.

Create support services to address elder abuse

- ❖ Establish services for victims and abusers
- ❖ Encourage reporting
- ❖ Train the caring professions

❖ Educate older persons about consumer fraud

As part of the effort to implement the recommendations of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, an Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Ministerial Conference will be held in Berlin, Germany from September 11-13, 2002. The Conference will focus on developing implementation strategies for the European and North American region that can be used by other regions throughout the world. Information about this event is available at www.mica2002.de.

The Political Declaration accompanying the Plan of Action, which entrusts governments with the primary responsibility for the implementation of the Plan, asserts that “effective collaboration between national and local governments, international agencies, older persons themselves and their organizations, other parts of civil society, including NGOs, and the private sector is essential. The implementation of the...Plan...will require the partnership and involvement of many stakeholders.”

INPEA and our partners are key stakeholders in the implementation of the actions relating to elder abuse. Through our active participation at the Valencia and NGO Forums, INPEA expanded our network of individual and organizational members and opened doors to international dialogue, cooperation and collaboration. We invite other interested individuals and organizations to contact us and join us in working toward our goal of worldwide prevention of abuse of older persons.

Contact information for the INPEA Officers, Regional Representatives and National Representatives is available...(PLEASE FILL IN, DAN).