Country Report for
The 2nd ASEAN & Japan High Level Officials Meeting
on
Caring Societies

Background on Question of Ageing

The "First World Assembly on Ageing" was held in Vienna, Austria in 1982 and 121 counties were represented at the Assembly. Myanmar did not attend the Assembly. An International Plan of Action which brought the issue of ageing firmly onto the international agenda was adopted at the Assembly and it recommended the following;

- The need to help the elderly lead independent lives of their own family and community for as long as possible, instead of being excluded and cut off from all activities of society,
- The importance of giving the elderly a choice as to kind of health care they receive, and the importance of preventive care, including nutrition and exercises,
- The need to provide social security schemes to assist the elderly in finding, or returning to employment and to provide support services to families to continue to care for elderly relatives.

However the First World Assembly and Plan of Action focused mainly on the ageing situation in the developed world and only from a social welfare perspective.

The United Nations General Assembly approved the Plan of Action in 1982 and in 1983 called upon Governments to set up, at the national level, appropriate mechanisms aimed at promoting the implementation of the Vienna Plan of Action. The International Conference on Ageing was held in October 1992 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Plan of Action.

At its 50th session of the General Assembly in 1995, a resolution entitled " International Year of Older Persons" towards a society for all ages was adopted without a vote. The General Assembly by this resolution, *inter alia,* took notes of the conceptual framework of a programme for the preparation and observance of the International Year of Older Persons in

1999; invited Member States to adopt the conceptual framework to national conditions and to consider formulating national programmes for the year. The General Assembly also decided thenceforth the term "older person" should be substituted for the term "elderly".

By resolution 52/80 the General Assembly encouraged all States, the United Nations system and all other sectors, in reaching out for a future society for all ages, to take advantage of the International Year of Older Persons so as to increase awareness of the challenge of the demographic ageing of societies, the individual and social needs of older persons, the contribution of older persons to societies and the need for a change in attitudes towards older person. The resolution was adopted without a vote.

The resolution 53/109, which was adopted without a vote, noted the successful launching of the International Year of Older Persons, with the theme " A society for all ages", on 1 October 1998 around the world and at UN Headquarters. The Assembly also called upon States, UN agencies and bodies and institutions of civil society, including the research community, to avoid age and gender bias in their treatment of older women so as to ensure that all older women have equal access to the private sector and to social services and to ensure their full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, encouraged States to embody in appropriate legislation the rights of older persons to equal access to and the use of social services, including care-giving systems and supports services, without any discrimination. The General Assembly, by the resolution, invited national committees to consider the desirability of drawing up (a) A set of principles for a society for all ages; (b) Practical Strategies for a society for all ages, aimed at mainstreaming ageing into programmes and policies, while ensuring that the immediate developmental, income-security and health-care needs of older persons are met.

The General Assembly in 1999 took note of the 1998 revision of the official United Nations population estimates and projections, which show that, with the continuation of the decline in fertility and the increase in life expectancy, the population of the world will age much faster in the next half-century than previously and requested the Commission for Social Development to adopt a recommendation on the desirability and feasibility of convening a second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002 and took note the offer by the Government of Spain to host the Assembly in 2002.

The second World Assembly on Ageing was held in Madrid, Spain from 8 to 10 April 2002. It was attended by representatives from 156 countries. Myanmar delegation led by H.E. U Hlaing Win, then Deputy Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement attended the Assembly. At the Assembly, Political Declaration and International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002 were adopted unanimously. Under the Plan of Action, recommendations for action were made to the following priorities:

- Older Persons and Development
- Advancing health and well-being into old age
- Ensuring enabling and supportive environments.

Social Welfare Services for Older Persons in Myanmar

The Government of the Union of Myanmar has put into effect its policy guidelines relating to the welfare of the elderly and aged. It is a traditional custom for a family in Myanmar to assume responsibility for the well-being of its elderly and aged members. There also exists social and religious obligation on the part of local communities to look after the older people. Homes for the aged are set up; charity organizations in various areas of the country are being operated jointly on public donations and government contributions.

Myanmar maintains that it would be useful to study the ways and means adopted in other countries to alleviate the general conditions to the aged and the elderly.

In compliance with UN Secretary - General's request for views and comments of Member States on designation of a "Day for the Aging" in their respective countries, the Government of the Union of Myanmar has conveyed the following information to the Secretary-General:

(a) The conditions of the aged and the elderly at present are not of a proportion to pose a social problem in the Union of Myanmar. Their welfare is taken care of in consonance with religious and cultural traditions that customarily prevail in the country.

(b) The "Day for the Aged", organized by the Supervisory Body of the Hninzigon Home for the Aged in Yangon, is observed in Myanmar every year on the first of November. In this

connection, small commemorative flags are distributed for sale in the States and Divisions of the Country for the purpose of raising funds. As a Member State of the United Nations Organization, Myanmar will exert all efforts to expand its activities in observing the "Day for the Aged".

The National Committee for Elderly Persons has been set up under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. The International Day of Older Persons was observed in October 1999 at national level and States and Divisions level as well.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement has replied in June 2000 answers to the Questionnaire sent by the UN Secretary-General eliciting the views of Member States on the outcomes of the First World Assembly on Ageing, including the future revision of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and elaboration of a long term strategy on ageing as a preparatory process to hold the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2001.

Myanmar society is made up of extended families comprising senior relatives such as mother, father, uncle and aunt, and every elderly person naturally receive care from their children, grandchildren and relatives. According to religious teachings, cultural traditions and social code of conduct, Myanmar people have high regard for the older people. To them, to look after the older people is a noble and meritorious deed of which they are proud. Therefore, the affairs of older people do not constitute a serious social problem in Myanmar. Homes for the Aged were established by religious and voluntary social organizations, for those who are aged 60 and above and in need of care for various reasons. At present, a total number of 45 Homes for the Aged exist throughout the country to provide food, clothing, shelter, healthcare services and general care to the older persons so that they are able to perform their respective religious rites and lead a peaceful life. Moreover, the State provides rice, funds for food, clothes and salary of the administrators of the Homes for the Aged every year.

To provide necessary services for the older persons, the Elderly Health Care Project, aimed at promoting the health of the elderly in Myanmar and increasing the accessibility of geriatric care services for them, was launched in 1993 with the support of WHO. The Elderly Health Care Project was initiated in six townships and expanded yearly. These townships were provided with special instruments for eye, ear and throat care and

dental care for the elderly. Manuals for provision of health care for the older people and pamphlets for health education were also developed and distributed to these townships.

Moreover, under the Project, basic health care training courses are conducted for doctors, nurses, local NGOs and volunteers. The clinic for the elderly is opened every Wednesday where curative care is given and basic physical exercises are demonstrated to the elderly people. Medical specialists give health education and counselling to elderly people as well as to families. At the clinics, reading glasses are also distributed and ocular lens are inserted free of charge for the elderly. In the townships covered by the Project, other activities such as collection of data on the elderly and recording of their health care status are also carried out in coordination and collaboration with local NGOs. The implementation of the Project has enhanced the health of the elderly and the accessibility of geriatric care services for them, thereby, enabling them to lead their daily lives healthily and independently.

In Myanmar, all Government servants may serve until the age of 60, which is the age for retirement. On retirement from service, they are entitled to gratuity and pension prescribed under the relevant rules and regulations. However, the State may, if necessary, continue to employ retired skilled and experienced personnel or appoint them as advisors. This enables the retirees to continue to serve the country by sharing their experiences, knowledge and skill with young generations. Apart from the government service, they may also serve in other capacities. A large number of elderly people are now serving in important positions in NGOs, voluntary organizations, companies and business firms. Through active involvement in the social, economic and religious sectors of the country, they are able to continue to lead an active life in the society. Under the Social Security Act, workers covered by the Social Security scheme, including the elderly workers, are entitled to free medical care and cash benefits.

The International Day of Older Persons, which falls on 1 October, is observed yearly in Myanmar. In observance of the International Day of Older Persons, ceremonies are held at all levels throughout the country. Various other activities such as donation of meal for one day to Homes for the Aged and launching of awareness campaigns in mass media in accordance with the motto "*Towards a Society for All Age*" are carried out. At the ceremonies held in observance of the Day, cash donations are made to

the older persons from Homes for the Aged and those elder persons talented in various fields are honoured.

Conclusion

There is no serious problem in Myanmar as far as the affairs of older persons are concerned. High regard of the Myanmar Society for older people, extended family type based on mutual dependence and cultural traditions and customs favourable to old age, are important contributing factors in this regard. However, in preparation for implications of globalization, Myanmar will continue to make every effort to maintain the existing traditions, to raise public awareness of the important role older persons play in the society, to mobilize government agencies, NGOs and voluntary organizations and the community to actively participate in caring for the older person, to promote the existing health care services and to do more research on the issues of old age.