

ECLAC/CDCC Meeting on the Phenomenon  
of Ageing and the situation of Older Persons  
in the Caribbean  
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**ECLAC/CDCC REPORT ON THE PHENOMENON OF AGEING  
AND THE SITUATION OF OLDER PERSONS  
IN THE CARIBBEAN**

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**REPORT ON THE PHENOMENON OF AGEING AND THE  
SITUATION OF OLDER PERSONS  
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Agenda Item 1: Opening

The meeting was opened by Dr. Len Ishmael, Director, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean/Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC), and Mr. Daniel Blanchard, Director, Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE), Santiago, Chile. This was followed by the feature address, presented by Mrs. Irma Loemban Tobing, Head of the Older Person's Commission, Suriname, and remarks by Senator Nizam Baksh, Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Social Development of Trinidad and Tobago, who spoke on behalf of the Honourable Minister Manohar Ramsaran, Minister of Community Development, Social Development, Sports and Youth Affairs.

Fourteen CDCC member and associate member countries were represented, namely: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Netherlands Antilles, Saint Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. There was also participation from several organizations, such as, the Caribbean Association of Industry and Commerce (CAIC), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) Gender Equity Fund, the Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD), the Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM), CELADE, the Department for International Development (DFID), the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Division for Social Policy and Development (DESA/DSPD) United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Also present at the meeting were representatives from three civil society organizations, two non-governmental organizations (NGOs), one academic institution and one private sector company. There were three experts in attendance. The list of participants of the meeting is attached as Annex 2.

Dr. Ishmael welcomed the delegates and reminded them of General Assembly resolution 47/5 which declared 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons, with the theme "Towards a Society for all Ages". The Director noted that this meeting would provide an opportunity for ECLAC

member countries to review and build on work already undertaken at the national and/or subregional levels and to set guidelines for future action by governments in relation to older persons in the subregion.

She noted that, from all available evidence, older persons in the Caribbean constituted a steadily growing segment of the population. From 1950 to 1995 that segment of the population had grown in absolute numbers from 1.2 million to 3.4 million. In 1950, persons over 60 comprised 6.9 per cent of the population, however, by 2005 they would be expected to comprise approximately 10.6 per cent. The older elderly, those over 75, were becoming a significant segment of the old population. In 1950, they comprised 19.2 per cent of the old but by 1995 this figure had risen to 28 per cent.

The Director reminded delegates that in the Caribbean, there was an interest not just in longevity, but in the quality of life which older persons should enjoy. She expressed the hope that the meeting, while examining the critical issues of income security, personal planning for ageing, access to quality health care, care and care giving, productive ageing, safety, and intergenerational relationships would simultaneously consider the financial constraints faced by governments in the region and be mindful of the need to ensure that older persons were not marginalised. She suggested that the policy prescriptions derived from the meeting should seek to ensure that older persons lived in an environment which upheld the United Nations Principles for Older Persons based on independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

The Director ended by advising delegates that the outcome of the day's work would provide a guide to the development of policies for ageing in the region.

CELADE Director, Mr. Daniel Blanchard, indicated that Chile and other Latin American countries were all experiencing the phenomenon of an increasing proportion of older persons with special needs within their respective populations. He suggested that steps should be taken to cater for these requirements since, at present, the systems were designed to meet primarily the needs of the younger persons of the society.

He continued to the effect that society was being called upon to produce goods and services specific to older persons and that this would involve new institutional structures, arrangements and, in some cases, high costs. Pension schemes had proven to be inadequate to compensate for the needs of the older persons and with the rise of the nuclear family, there were smaller and smaller family sizes bearing the demographic burden.

However, he concluded that the burgeoning labour force would be a helpful factor in generating resources required to address the special needs of the older persons.

In her feature address entitled *Critical Concerns of Ageing and Older Persons in the Caribbean*, Mrs. Loemban Tobing outlined the demographic changes occurring globally which had increased the proportion of older persons. She presented what she considered a paradoxical situation, in which older persons played a vital role in the development of the world, yet at the same time belonged to the most vulnerable group. She suggested that older persons were the first victims of poverty in the event of decline in economic fortunes. She also debunked several myths concerning older people, namely:

- Older people were a homogeneous group
- Men and women aged in the same way
- Older people were frail
- Older people had nothing to contribute
- Older people were an economic burden on society; and
- Most older people lived in developed countries.

She shared with the delegates the recent classification of older persons as the young old (50-65), the mid old (66-75), the old old (76-80) and the oldest old (above 80). She reminded delegates of the number of international forums where human development was stressed as being paramount, but concluded that concrete actions to ensure that these principles applied to the most vulnerable in society had not been forthcoming.

Mrs. Loemban Tobing brought to the attention of the delegates two documents which addressed the integration of the concerns of older persons into the development of society. The first, The International Instrument on Ageing, adopted as an Action Plan, intimated that older persons had all the basic fundamental human rights, were entitled to a good quality of life and should be able to enjoy a fulfilled existence within communities. The second instrument was the United Nations International Principles for Older Persons, which contained 18 items, among which were concerns relating to independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

She made reference to the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) Declaration, and to the Secretary-General's message at the launching of the International Year of the Older Persons which highlighted the changing demography, the multigenerational input into development, respect for and attention to the needs of older persons and assistance for developing countries which had to battle both sustainable development challenges and accommodation of ageing populations.

She suggested that there were many critical concerns in the subregion: health, care giving, housing, safety conditions, financial independence, transportation, family support, political participation, employment, education and environment. She reminded delegates that, in many instances, the problems could be related to the lack of access to resources.

She further suggested that since the majority of Caribbean governments did not act speedily to address the issues outlined by the World Assembly on Ageing (1982), the respective countries had lagged behind in having systems in place to accommodate the older persons in the societies.

Mrs. Loemban Tobing's recommendations to the delegates were that:

(a) The United Nations Principles be revisited and that regular communication and representation of older people be facilitated at the national level. The National Commissions of Older Persons needed to be more prominent and should use the current electronic media more effectively to make their presence felt;

(b) Local Commissions should associate and align themselves with international events and activities which had the older persons as their focus to promote solidarity. In a related area, the promotion and participation of older persons in activities regarding information and technology should be facilitated;

(c) A Caribbean Platform of Older Persons be established to promote networking and cooperation within the Caribbean on issues of particular relevance to older people; and

(d) A Human Rights Education Programme in collaboration with the organization "People's Decade for Human Rights Education" be undertaken to focus and promote awareness on the rights of older persons.

Mrs. Loemban Tobing concluded with a call for the older person to be an integral part of the human community. She also called for the fulfilment of the themes expressed by the international logo of older persons: vitality, diversity and interdependence, movement and progression.

Senator Nizam Baksh greeted the gathering and thanked the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat for convening the meeting which facilitated the interfacing of planners and decision makers throughout the region. He reminded the gathering of his Government's efforts to fulfil the mandate of people-centred development and called attention to the United Nations Human Development Indices in 1997 and 1999, which put Trinidad and Tobago at the top of the ranking of those nations defined as "Medium Human Development" ranked nations.

Senator Baksh then noted the challenges of globalization and the emergence of a new underclass in the New World Order.

He further suggested that the singling out of the older person in society had relevance because of the current demographic shifts in the age structure of the population, caused by better access to health care and nutrition. He pointed out that this ageing population trend was no less apparent in developing countries and the percentage of older persons in Trinidad and Tobago was expected to shift from 9 per cent to 15 per cent between the years 1990 to 2020, aided and abetted by return migration. He noted that this would increase the burden on the social systems and efforts would have to be made to accommodate this expected increase.

He informed the meeting that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago had embarked upon a series of initiatives including public awareness and training, an adopt-a-home programme and increased economic assistance to the older person. This, he indicated, was being undertaken along with a national survey of the living conditions of older persons in the country. He urged continued work towards the development of a Charter for Older Persons in the Caribbean, which should, inter alia, entail a consensual policy for implementation.

The Senator concluded by thanking the UNDP for its assistance to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in the preparation of documents for the United Nations Special Session of the General Assembly for the Review and Appraisal of the WSSD+5.

## Agenda Item 2: Adoption of the agenda

The meeting then adopted the agenda, as presented, and organized the day's work.

## Agenda Item 3: An examination of ageing and older persons in the Caribbean

The meeting proceeded with panel one, which heard from Dr. Wendell Samuel, Director, Research and Information, ECCB, and Mr. C. Thompson, Economics Department, University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine.

Dr. Wendell Samuel presented his paper on "*The Economic Impact of Older Persons on the Society*". The presentation focused on four major aspects: the theoretical framework within which the economic analysis of the economic impact occurred; the characteristics, status and trends in the elderly population in selected Caribbean nations; the economic issues related to demographic ageing; and suggested policy actions in response to the evidence.

Dr. Samuel contended that the impact of ageing on the society could be viewed through many lenses. He noted that some experts argued that older persons tended to have lower consumption rates than younger members of society, so that a population that was ageing would cause less economic growth and dampen consumption within the market economy.

Other experts, such as the World Bank, looked at ageing through the Life Cycle Hypothesis (LCH), suggesting that income and savings were low in the early years, high in the prime working years, with consumption of savings occurring in the later years to maintain the lifestyle to which an individual had become accustomed. As savings in most instances had not proved adequate, this would be accompanied by government expenditure to maintain an acceptable quality of life.

Dr. Samuel suggested that savings might not always work in this manner, since it was found that for a given level of income, elderly people actually saved more than others in the population. The LCH theory had also been used, Dr. Samuel suggested, to justify policies of reducing birth/fertility rates to avoid dependency ratios in the population, to preserve as high a proportion of active workers as possible and to generate savings. This assumption was still under intense scrutiny, with some suggesting that economic performance was unlikely to be so pegged to the dependency ratios.



Dr. Samuel noted that in the Caribbean region, the demographic trend indicated that with the exception of Barbados and Montserrat, the Caribbean, as a whole, had a relatively young population. However, the presence of a growing proportion of elderly made it necessary to examine the present conditions under which they lived. He indicated that data were unfortunately scarce and that the examples used were taken from a study undertaken in Saint Lucia which was believed to be illustrative of the Caribbean situation. He reported that the health status of older persons could be classified as between fair and poor, with the most common ailments being deafness, hypertension and diabetes. The data also pointed to the fact that most of the elderly surveyed did not regularly eat a balanced diet.

With respect to housing, Dr. Samuel reported that 85 per cent of the elderly resided in undivided dwellings, but only 29 per cent had freehold tenure. There was evidence of a breakdown of the extended family which resulted in one half of the elderly surveyed living alone or with a spouse. He reported that the majority experienced some type of marginalisation and this reinforced the need for official and informal support mechanisms, since the older persons, as a group, were vulnerable to poverty. They appeared to be overrepresented at both the lowest and highest income quintile. Dr. Samuel reminded delegates that older women tended to be particularly vulnerable to poverty for biological and cultural reasons, as well as having a greater life expectancy than their male counterparts.

Dr. Samuel identified return migration as an additional factor which could raise the age of Caribbean populations. He suggested that the impact of this could be twofold. On the negative side, return migration could serve to reduce the proportion of the working population at its peak and place an additional burden on social security systems. This could be so if those individuals who returned with little then claimed government assistance. On the positive side, however, many returning migrants could come back with accumulated savings and technical skills, which would redound to the benefit of the local economy. Dr. Samuel suggested that these migrants might open businesses which would serve to fuel the domestic or even export economy.

Dr. Samuel described two systems for providing for the elderly in a society. In the first one, those currently employed transferred payments to the elderly, through a national insurance scheme and ensured that the next working generation would do the same. Alternatively, employed persons secured their economic future via savings. He indicated that most social security schemes were based on the LCH model and operated by either restricting benefits to pensioners or restricting benefits to contributors. They did not take into account increasing the productivity of

older persons, nor increased labour force participation or employment creation among this segment of the population.

He reported that informal support systems operated via the extended family, community and NGOs. Such systems had the advantage of being able to pool resources and assess risks more effectively, thus holding down the cost of delivery of services and care. He suggested that the informal support systems might have difficulty due to insufficient income transfers, or loss of the base of support due to migration. In any event, a combination of the informal and formal systems needed to be considered in the Caribbean context.

In conclusion, Dr. Samuel recommended that, in light of the ageing of the Caribbean populations, it was necessary to ensure the continued productivity of the older persons via participation in, for example, micro enterprises, transmission of cultural values in educational institutions, mediation and advisory services. He suggested that it was necessary for policy makers to promote policies that would lead to: (i) income generating projects for older persons; (ii) the removal of the perception that older persons were dependent; and (iii) an active ageing process with respect to individual choice and participation in the labour force.

Most importantly, Dr. Samuel proposed that productive ageing must be viewed against a background of employment creation within the economy as a whole to prevent intergenerational conflict over scarce jobs. He assured the delegates that since the full effects of ageing would not confront the Caribbean until at least 2030, there was adequate time to devise innovative and sustainable strategies.

The next panelist Mr. Carlos Thompson, Research Associate, presented the paper, "*Financing the Needs of the Elderly*", prepared by Dr. Karl Theodore, Health Economics Unit, UWI, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, which used the Trinidad and Tobago National Insurance Scheme (NIS) as a case study. Mr. Thompson argued that the shift in demography noticed in the society, which resulted in older persons forming an ever-increasing proportion of the population, could cause a demographic burden since special services had to be developed to cater for the specific needs of this group. In that regard, he noted the need for citizens' benefits to be put in place for the period of retirement and the use of a social system to ensure that impoverishment was not a threat. In that regard, the NIS was a defined contribution system, which allowed for increased savings in the current period for consumption in the next.

He suggested that analysis of the expenses and income of the NIS Board between 1972 and 1998 had shown that there was relatively little money left for investment. More worrisome was that payment for

necessary benefits could have been threatened if expenses continued to climb with little increase in the contributions to the NIS.

Mr. Thompson remarked that the viability of NIS tended to vary with the state of the economy. This occurred, he reported, since contribution levels would tend to drop due to economic downturn, as an increase in unemployment might occur. In addition, administrative costs which were fixed at the introduction of the scheme, as a percentage of total contribution, inhibited the introduction of technology which might have increased the efficiency of the system. This was coupled with the fact that benefit expenses increased due to the growing number of persons reaching retirement age, in addition to an increase in life expectancy. Data indicated that over the past 24 years there had been a fourfold increase in the number of people reaching retirement age.

Mr. Thompson warned that when expenses exceeded contributions, the NIS Board was forced to use reserves to supplement the shortfall. He noted that despite the average annual increase in inflation of around 9 per cent during the 1980s, it was not until 1999, that there had been an increase in the contribution demanded from workers. This lag increased the risk factor of the fund not being able to meet its future needs and could lead to the jeopardization of the pensions of present workers.

Another threat to the fund was the tendency by governments to use pension contributions to spur economic growth. This, he stated, might not have been a judicious use of the fund.

Mr. Thompson noted that the recent increase in NIS contributions had been met with resistance from the trade unions which sometimes viewed this added outflow to the NIS as conflicting with their own pension schemes.

Mr. Thompson suggested that in view of future needs, the following conclusions could be drawn:

(a) The NIS contribution costs were not too high and the 1999 increase was necessary to avoid further risk to future pensioners;

(b) The system was not independent of the demographic burden nor the state of the economy and compensations should be made for such, when planning the NIS system;

(c) There was a higher risk to the elderly under the defined contribution system; and

(d) The NIS reserves were used too early.

Considering the present state of the NIS system and what it would be called upon to produce in the future, the following recommendations were made:

(a) The National Insurance Scheme should be operated independently of the government, especially since the government had in the past used money from contributions for capital expenditure and had the authority to write off the debt, risking in the process the benefits of future pensioners;

(b) The population should be prepared to endure higher contributions to the NIS, due to the increasing number of persons who must be served and to buffer the scheme in times of economic downturn; and

(c) Public confidence needed to be restored in the NIS, so that people would be willing to contribute and not attempt to evade the paying of the contributions. The NIS Board should conduct its affairs and campaign in such a manner that the citizenry could feel assured that their benefits would be available, when needed.

A roundtable discussion followed.

It was suggested that in light of the current demographic trends in some islands, the fertility rate might need to be increased. The low replacement rate of the populations in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, specifically, coupled with the loss of the working and reproductive age group (especially males) due to HIV/AIDS was cause for concern. It was recommended that the family planning focus, especially on the need for small nuclear families, might need to be reconsidered.

On the issue of returning migrants bringing capital into a nation, mention was made of the fact that these persons might be accustomed to a standard of health care and social services which many of the islands could not provide. This factor might act as a disincentive for those who might wish to return. In addition, the low level of contribution (per capita population) to pension and other benefits would now have to accommodate additional persons, further diminishing the quality and quantity of public services and care available. The shortfall in quality of health care that might have to be made up by family might prove to be inadequate under these conditions.

Concerns were raised, that from a social integration perspective, many of these returning persons would bring value systems with them that were alien to the society in which they intended to reside. It was suggested that governments and policy makers needed to devise

mechanisms for their reintegration. It was also proposed, that an educational strategy was needed to instill and reinforce an appreciation of the older person.

It was reiterated that the inclusion of the older person in policy formation was long overdue.

It was noted that with respect to the ability of the present social system to accommodate the needs of the elderly, the question of the self employed who made little or no contribution to the social system needed to be resolved. It was also stated that the government would have to support those who were unemployed at the time when they were eligible for old age pension and other benefits, whether they had been employed or not.

On the issue of health, it was suggested that with the present high cost of drugs, some consideration would have to be given to reducing this cost to older persons. In addition, many agencies were involved in the care and delivery of services to older persons and because of a lack of collaboration and cohesion, the care of the older person became piecemeal and inadequate. It was recommended that the health sector should consider the provision of special services directed to older persons in a more integrated manner. This notion needed to be promulgated at a regional level, perhaps at the CARICOM level, using its Charter on the Aged, as a possible point of departure.

The issue of productive employment received much attention. It was mentioned that if persons were allowed to retire later, then available jobs would be denied to younger persons wishing to enter the job market. One solution was that policy makers place more emphasis on job creation. Another option offered was to generate productive employment for older persons and develop innovative strategies which could be funded by international agencies interested in such programmes. However, it was observed that a lack of policy had tended to inhibit the latter approach.

In some Caribbean countries, it seemed that culture served to perpetuate poverty among the elderly, especially women. Instances were cited in which the elderly transferred, before death, all assets to their children, often giving the males preference. The females were then left to look after their parents with limited resources. In addition, the social stigma associated with homes for the elderly, referred to disparagingly as "poor houses", had led to many older persons living alone with less than adequate care, since they were reluctant to enter such institutions.

The need to train and prepare the older persons for retirement, so that alternative lifestyles could be adopted, was stressed.

On the reform of the pension fund systems, legislative change was proposed. The NIS, it was felt, should be independent of governments or even private firms. This was deemed to be especially important where governments might have access to these funds and could write off the debt. This type of action, all agreed, could undermine the potential of the NIS.

It was recommended that information on ageing needed to be made available to governments in a timely manner, to assist them in making informed decisions with respect to the needs of the older person. A call for a lobby, especially at the Cabinet and parliamentary level, to keep the older person in the public spotlight was made. A public campaign was also suggested, to showcase the positive sides of ageing in our populations. A CARICOM group dedicated to such, with national branches throughout the region, was recommended. This could be supported by women's NGOs to strengthen the awareness-raising initiative.

It was agreed at the meeting that as a result of attending to the interests of the older person, the entire society would benefit.

The meeting then heard from the second panel comprising Dr. Robert Gaskin, Geriatrician, Ministry of Health, Barbados; Ms. Sandra John, Chief, Documentation Centre, ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean; and Mr. Anton La Fond, Transportation Planner, TEC Transfer Centre, University of the West Indies, St Augustine.

Dr. Robert Gaskin, presented the paper entitled, *The wellbeing of older persons - What is the necessary policy response?* In his paper, he informed of the global increase in the population of the older persons. He stated that this increase had major economic and care implications. He proposed that the well-being of the elderly was an interrelationship of the following: health, economic, social conditions, disease and of the ageing process itself.

Dr. Gaskin welcomed the declaration by the United National General Assembly of the year 1999 as the International Year of the Older Person, as it had brought the issues of ageing to the forefront. He suggested that it should be seen as an important point of departure for the subregion in respect of a more coordinated and systematic approach to acknowledging the realities of ageing and the implications for our respective countries. Furthermore, this declaration would enable the subregion to plan appropriately for the elderly to be an integral component of our societies.

The paper argued that adequate, timely and reliable demographic data were essential for the formulation of policies and action programmes for the elderly and for the evaluation of the progress of the strategies.

Dr. Gaskin highlighted the following significant ageing trends of the Caribbean subregion:

(a) The demographic transition had taken place in the Caribbean and the old-old was the fastest growing sector of the elderly population; (a number of demographers and gerontologists use the terms young-old which referred to persons between the 60-74 age-group and old-old for those persons 75 and over);

(b) The young-old had, in the majority, ageless longevity, i.e. good health because of medical advances, healthy lifestyles and healthy finances;

(c) The serious effects of HIV/AIDS on the trends of population ageing, causing decimation of the working age-group (15-59) and thus increasing the old age dependency ratio and the ageing index by reducing the number of persons in the population under 15 years;

(d) The lack of training for formal and informal caregivers.

He identified policy requirements in the subregion as:

(a) Planning for the higher rate of long-term physical and mental disabilities, especially in females, because of the growth of the old-old;

(b) A drastic change in the policy on HIV/AIDS from, in the main, counselling and condoms, to one of public health i.e., prevention and treatment;

(c) That the broad, but intrinsically related, field of training on ageing should include: demography and epidemiology of ageing, health of the elderly, economic and financial aspects of ageing and social gerontology;

(d) Policies and programmes which supported, protected and strengthened the family, should be initiated so as to enable the family to continue to respond to the needs of its elderly members;

(e) Establishment of a Bureau of Elderly Affairs whose broad function should include, among others, the following: involving the elderly in policies related to them; establishing of a database on the elderly in the community; avoiding fragmentation of the services to and for the elderly.

Ms. Sandra John, Chief, Documentation Centre, ECLAC/CDCC secretariat, in her presentation entitled, *Information technology and older persons*, focused on the challenges facing the older person in the world today. She suggested that the future generations of older persons would have had the opportunity to develop the habit of using information technology, but that present-day older persons faced seemingly insurmountable problems in trying to adjust to the computer age. Ms. John, provided a simple definition of information technology as "electronics-based technology which can be used to collect, store, process and package information and provide access to knowledge", and stated that by this definition, information technology could have a positive effect on the situations and general development of the older person. She suggested that recent events had seen the telephone and television merging with the computer to provide many new possibilities for employment, business development and lifestyles, in general.

Ms. John outlined several ways in which information technology had made positive contributions to our social environment, and suggested ways in which the older person might benefit from these advances. For them, the Internet could be used as follows:

- (a) To monitor health related issues or finances;
- (b) To engage in retirement planning;
- (c) As a means of companionship, via email, games, chat rooms, etc;
- (d) To purchase medication and gifts;
- (e) To keep abreast of international news and weather forecasts of places where loved ones resided; and
- (f) As a means of earning supplemental retirement income via web-based job opportunities.

She recommended that information technology could also be useful through improved computerized telephone technology allowing the older person to perform banking transactions, among other things. On the other hand, excessive or continual use of computers had introduced new medical conditions and increased incidence of some old ones. Ms. John reminded the delegates that there were also well-documented negative social and economic consequences associated with the information age, such as a decrease in the number of jobs for the unskilled; easier access



to pornography; new opportunities for fraud; increased scope for misinformation and increasing social isolation.

In closing, Ms. John offered suggestions regarding precautions for older persons who used computers and steps that governments and other organizations could take in order to facilitate older persons, with the means, to benefit from the information age. With respect to the individual, the following were put forward:

(a) That a large monitor with an anti-glare screen be used to lower the associated health risks to the eyes;

(b) That there be adequate lighting and ventilation in the room where the computer was located;

(c) That an ergonomically designed workstation be used to provide proper support to the back, legs, neck and wrists; and

(d) That older persons, in particular, have regular eye examinations.

With respect to policy makers, Ms. John stated that the onus was on governments and organizations to create the infrastructure, provide the necessary information, promote the use of information technology and educate the older person on the benefits that could be derived from the use of this technology.

Mr. Anton La Fond, Transportation Planner for the Elderly and Disabled, Technology Transfer Center, University of the West Indies, presented his paper on "*Infrastructure in the Caribbean - Are we ready for the ageing population?*" Mr. La Fond examined existing infrastructure in the areas of health, public transport, recreation, social services, work facilities and accommodation. He analyzed the present infrastructure's capacity to meet the safety needs of older persons and outlined the requirements based on gender differentials, in order to support older persons.

He argued that, based on the current infrastructure, the Caribbean was not ready for the ageing population. He went further to suggest that the region was unaware of the facilities required to meet the needs of the elderly. In addition, ageing was not a major topic of concern in the Caribbean as little real emphasis was placed on assisting the elderly.

He recommended that in order to respond to the challenges of the subregion, each country should outline sound and affordable policies that would address the issues of the aged, and change the perception of ageing

to one that was a natural process of life. He stressed that 'healthy ageing' agencies must form an integral part of our developing subregion. Such proactive approaches would contribute to the elimination of the present societal fear of ageing. Furthermore, a drive to establish these agencies would encourage the public and private sectors to become more attentive to the elderly and their future.

Mr. La Fond concluded that living longer was both an achievement and a perpetual challenge. Investing in health and promoting it throughout the life span was the only way to ensure that more people would attain old age and be capable of contributing to society intellectually, spiritually and physically.

Agenda Item 4: Presentation of draft policy statement followed by discussion

Following the panel presentations, the Chairperson convened a working group of the Whole which discussed the previous panels and made recommendations for a policy on ageing and older persons in the Caribbean. These were presented to the meeting for agreement.

The meeting agreed that the following issues should be taken into consideration when drafting the Policy Statement on Ageing.

(a) The issue of sexuality and ageing, though it did not appear as a separate agenda item, should form part of a research agenda.

(b) The fact that caregivers of the older persons and the chronically ill were often older persons themselves.

(c) The implications for family planning in the changing demographic scenario.

(d) There were significant differences among the many stakeholders already involved in caring for the elderly, including governments. Urgent legal reform was required to ensure that safety and quality care was provided by all. It was important that the input of the primary stakeholder, the elderly themselves, was not ignored.

(e) Providing for the older person was a multisectoral process and should be approached, as such, by ensuring all sectors of society were involved in meeting their needs, inter alia, health care, nutrition and housing. In this context, there was need to bridge the gap between the generations. Also, a strategy should be designed to encourage governments to make budget allocations to the relevant sectoral components.

(f) With respect to productive employment, social integration has to be the main objective. The changing global situation made it difficult to position trained and highly skilled women and youth into relevant jobs. This situation was peculiar to older persons as well. To overcome this there must be a broad-based, macro social and economic policy and strategy addressing the increasing marginalization of the elderly.

(g) The establishment of a Caribbean Institute for Ageing, under the auspices of the Health and Economics Unit of the University of the West Indies, which would incorporate the development of sound practices for, inter alia, income security and pensions systems for the elderly.

(h) Since investment in older persons and special needs persons was an investment in development, then strategies should be designed which matched their skills with national needs in an effort to develop an integrated approach to macro social policy.

(i) The development of a cohesive strategic national social plan which could be funded both through the national budgeting process and through the international donor community.

(j) The development and articulation of an information policy on ageing.

The establishment of national focal points to monitor national commitments at international conferences and to ensure the implementation at the national level of agreements reached.

The Chairperson assured the meeting that these issues would be taken into consideration along with the other recommendations which had been made during the course of the day's deliberations (see Annex 1) in the preparation of guidelines for a Policy Statement on Aging and Older Persons in the Caribbean

#### Agenda Item 5: Close

The meeting was brought to a close with the usual exchange of courtesies. Governments thanked the experts for their presentations and ECLAC/CDCC secretariat for convening the meeting. Participants were reminded by the CARICOM Secretariat representative of the upcoming launch of the Caribbean Charter on Health and Ageing.

Annex 1**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. A Human Rights Education programme should be established.
2. Co-establish a Caribbean Older Persons platform.
3. Offer computer and internet training programmes for older persons.
4. An integrated approach between the formal and informal systems/methods of providing for the older person should be pursued.
5. Promote economically active ageing by allowing the older person to participate more fully.
6. Conduct research which would provide a clearer picture of poverty among the elderly since poverty among the elderly is multifaceted.
7. Governments of the subregion need to put in place the necessary and relevant policies that would serve to support the inevitable ageing of its population.
8. That greater autonomy of the national insurance systems be considered.
9. Prepare the population for higher contribution rates to the NIS.
10. Restore confidence in national insurance systems.
11. Formulate policies and action programmes for the elderly and evaluate the progress of these strategies.
12. Policy makers should begin planning now for the higher rate of long-term physical effects and mental disabilities which would become evident as the ageing of the population increases.
13. Develop a public health policy approach for dealing with the HIV/AIDS pandemic facing the region.
14. Develop a cadre of personnel in the region who are able to deal with ageing population issues through training in areas such as:

- (a) Demography and epidemiology of ageing;
- (b) Health of the elderly;
- (b) Economic and financial aspects of ageing; and
- (c) Social gerontology.

15. Initiate policies and programmes which support, protect and strengthen the Caribbean family structures.

16. Establish a Bureau of Elderly Affairs that would:

- (a) Involve the elderly in policies related to the ageing;
- (b) Create a database on the elderly in the community;
- (c) Avoid fragmentation of the services to and for the elderly.

17. That sexuality and ageing be given consideration in the whole scheme of providing for the elderly.

18. The situation of the older person is a multidimensional one and should be approached, as such, by getting all sectors of the society involved in meeting the needs of the older persons in the society.

19. Develop policies which aim at bridging the gap between the generations.

20. Productive ageing is an important process for the older persons in the society. To successfully achieve such, the issues of the older persons should be mainstreamed in the society.

21. A clear employment generation policy is needed to achieve the level of development and equity which is desired in the Caribbean.

22. The need for legal reform to protect the inheritance rights of women and children and reduce the impoverishment of the older woman.

23. The need to prepare workers for retirement.

24. With respect to public sector reform, there should be succession planning.

25. The establishment of a Caribbean Institute for Ageing that would incorporate, inter alia, the study of income security and pension systems.

26. To encourage governments to make budget allocations to relevant sectors which provide services and care for the elderly.

27. The need for a Caribbean Association of Older Persons, with national branches, to monitor the implementation of decisions taken at international conferences and to advise on policy regarding older persons.

Annex 2

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