

Caribbean Intergovernmental Conference
in follow-up to the Latin America and Caribbean
Regional Plan of Action on Population and
Development – Focus on Ageing
Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
30 October 2007

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**REPORT OF THE CARIBBEAN INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE
IN FOLLOW-UP TO THE LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN
REGIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT –
FOCUS ON AGEING**

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Introduction

The Caribbean Intergovernmental Conference in follow-up to the Latin America and Caribbean Regional Plan of Action on Population and Development – Focus on Ageing was held at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, on 30 October 2007.

The conference was attended by representatives of eight member States of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC): Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. Two associate members of the CDCC, Montserrat and the Netherlands Antilles, were also in attendance.

Representatives from the Population Division of ECLAC Headquarters; the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); the Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM) and HelpAge International also attended. The list of participants is attached at Annex 2.

Agenda item 1: Election of officers

The following officers were elected:

Chairperson: Netherlands Antilles
Rapporteur: Grenada

Agenda item 2: Adoption of agenda

The following agenda was adopted:

1. Election of officers
2. Adoption of agenda
3. ECLAC welcome
4. Introduction of participants
5. Presentations:
 - i. Intergovernmental Conference on Population and Development and Second World Assembly on Ageing: The way forward in the Caribbean

- ii. An overview of the first cycle of the review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing from Madrid to Brazil: Review and Appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action in the Caribbean
6. Discussion
7. Country statements
8. Working groups on ageing:
 - i. Older persons and development
 - ii. Advancing health and well-being into old age
 - iii. Ensuring enabling and supportive environments
9. Presentation of the findings of the working groups and adoption of the Caribbean position to be presented to the Second Regional Intergovernmental Conference on Ageing (Brazil)
10. Report of the Rapporteur
11. Closing of the meeting.

**Agenda item 3:
Welcome and opening remarks**

The Director of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, Mr. Neil Pierre, welcomed the participants. In his address, he emphasized the fact that ageing posed a major challenge to the countries of the Caribbean, given the rapid changes that these societies were experiencing with globalization. This transformation affected social cohesion and particularly the composition of families and extended social networks. To cope with these challenges, the countries needed to make far-ranging changes in their forms of social and economic organization to fill the void often left by disrupted families and dissolved informal networks. He emphasized the need for inclusive systems for social protection and health care that would meet the needs of the elderly in Caribbean societies. He also pointed to the requirement for a cultural change aimed at building societies for all in this part of the world.

**Agenda item 4:
Introduction of participants**

At the request of Grenada, participants introduced themselves to the meeting.

**Agenda item 5:
Presentations**

The following two presentations were made at the meeting:

- (a) *International Conference on Population and Development and Second World Assembly on Ageing: The way forward on ageing in the Caribbean.*

This presentation summarized the evolution of the theme of ageing since the adoption of the Cairo Programme of Action at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994. It presented the critical aspects of ageing addressed in the Cairo Programme of Action and its follow-up conferences in the Latin America and the Caribbean region. The presentation further provided a brief summary of the review and appraisal process for the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing and it concluded with a socio-demographic overview of ageing in the Caribbean using census data for Saint Lucia.

- (b) *An overview of the first cycle of the review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing from Madrid to Brazil: Review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action in the Caribbean.*

This presentation provided a summary of the global review and appraisal process of the Madrid Plan of Action adopted in 2002 at the Second World Conference on Population Ageing. The meeting was informed that the Commission for Social Development that has responsibility for follow-up of the Madrid Plan of Action at the global level endorsed, at its forty-first session in 2003, a bottom-up approach for its first review and appraisal cycle. At the global level, the review and appraisal was to be undertaken every five years. The forty-fifth session of the Commission for Social Development provided the first forum for the international community to present progress made and challenges encumbered in implementing the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing in their country. This session also launched the first global review and appraisal process that is to be supported by the regional commissions of the United Nations. To implement this mandate, ECLAC, in collaboration with the Government of Brazil, would convene the Second Regional Intergovernmental Conference on Ageing in Brasilia, 4 – 6 December 2007.

**Agenda item 6:
Discussion**

Participants were invited to discuss any matters arising out of the presentations. Of critical importance was the need for those Caribbean countries that had not submitted their country reports on the application of the Regional Strategy for the Implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing to do so by 15 November 2007. These reports were to be compiled by the Population Division of ECLAC (CELADE) into a background document that would provide an overview of the status of implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action in Latin American and the Caribbean, which would be presented at the Second Intergovernmental Regional Conference on Ageing, to be held in Brazil in December 2007. While the official deadline for submission of survey results had already passed, the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean offered to collect the

information and include this into the regional document prior to its presentation to the forthcoming session of the Commission for Social Development in 2008.

The issue of legislation to treat with matters concerning the aged in the subregion was seen as critical to their safety and well-being. While all participants reported on programmes and policies and, in some cases, legislative frameworks that had been put in place by their various governments to provide for and protect their elderly, it was felt that without clearly defined and harmonized legislation within the countries and across the subregion, adequate safety and protection of the elderly could not be guaranteed. Further, participants discussed the idea of adopting a proactive approach to working together to draft and communicate relevant policies for submission to their respective heads of government. Through the establishment of such a regional process, countries could benefit sooner from regionally harmonized social legislation on ageing. In this regard, it was important for countries to share best practices, experiences and other vital information on ageing across the subregion.

Also with respect to legislation and the free movement of people, there was a need to address contingent rights and the movement of the elderly, discrimination and violence, enforcement of judgments and protection orders. The meeting was informed that the Second Intergovernmental Regional Conference on Ageing was to be hosted by the Government of Brazil through its Ministry of Human Rights, a fact that presented an ideal opportunity for issues of human rights and the elderly to be promoted in the international arena.

It was reported that the prevalence of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) was on the rise among those aged 60 years and over. Given the fact that the Caribbean was ranked second highest in the world with respect to HIV prevalence, participants felt that this issue needed to be placed on the ageing agenda and discussed at the political level throughout the subregion. Another area of concern in relation to health was the issue of lifestyle-related diseases and disability. Given the fact that many of the aged were disabled, and that the disabled would age, it was necessary to enhance and/or implement monitoring and evaluation strategies to better understand the impact of these ailments on the elderly. The meeting was informed that ECLAC had recently published a document on disability in the Caribbean, *Disability in the Caribbean – A study of four countries: A socio-demographic analysis of the disabled* (LC/CAR/L.134), and planned to continue its work in the area of disability in 2008, with particular emphasis on enhancing research and intraregional communication and promoting awareness on issues related to disability in the Caribbean.

It was highlighted that the bottom-up approach to developing and implementing policies and programmes for the elderly was found to be the most successful and adequate way to identify the outreach of the programmes and policies undertaken and to identify the needs of the elderly. This approach allowed for policies and programmes to be informed by the elderly, their caregivers, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders involved in addressing issues surrounding the aged. UNFPA and CARICOM informed the meeting that they would be collaborating to develop a strategy to allow for information sharing and support for policy development and strategic planning in the subregion.

Also raised was the issue of whether policies on ageing were linked to the Millennium Development Goals and poverty reduction strategies. Many of the participants reported that their ageing agendas were aligned primarily to national poverty reduction strategies that were then used to monitor progress towards achieving the Goals. It was recognized, however, that a more effective way to monitor progress in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action could be to use the Millennium Development Goals and targets as a framework to establish national monitoring strategies.

The considerable migration flows being experienced in the Caribbean (both inflows and outflows) was another critical issue negatively affecting the elderly, resulting often in the disruption of access to informal and family-based social and economic support systems. Migration also burdened the elderly with additional family responsibilities since frequently grandchildren were left behind in the care and custody of their grandparents.

Another area of general concern raised at the meeting was the fact that progress towards providing care and protection for the elderly was rather uneven across countries in the subregion. In some instances, free services were not always easily accessible, and in others easily accessible services were often priced outside the financial reach of the elderly. Political manipulation of public assistance was also a problem. The social exclusion of the elderly from the policy development process meant that these problems could not be easily rectified. They often fell through the system by being defined within the vague category of the “vulnerable”, resulting in a lack of specific and adequate systems to deal with issues particularly related to the elderly. For example, some programmes that, according to the participants, did not clearly address or provide for the needs of the elderly were disaster management and HIV/AIDS programmes, micro-credit initiatives, employment and training activities and the provision of low-income housing. Finally some countries stated that they still did not have an established institution or focal point on issues surrounding the elderly.

Agenda item 7: Country statements

The following delegations made statements describing the main policies and activities being implemented in their countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, the Netherlands Antilles and Montserrat.

The statements described the legal and organizational advances made in their countries in relation to older persons as well as the main policy initiatives and programmes carried out since the World Assembly on Ageing. Of particular importance were the advances in the formulation and adoption of national policies and supportive legislation. They also mentioned the difficulties encountered in collecting data and monitoring progress made and stressed the need to strengthen and support dialogue, coordination and cooperation with all stakeholders in government, civil society and faith-based organizations at the national and regional level. Officials expressed an urgent need to have laws enacted to enforce the rights of the elderly and to provide protection against financial, physical and other forms of abuse.

The governments of the subregion gave high priority to extending already existing social security coverage by increasing pensions paid and by establishing and strengthening non-contributory pension schemes. Of particular importance was the high proportion of persons employed in the informal sector and efforts were undertaken to also include those segments of the population into available pension and social security schemes. The fact that the elderly in the Caribbean continued working beyond their retirement age was mentioned, along with the need to create and maintain adequate employment opportunities for this sector of the population since this was often the only means for many elderly to sustain themselves. To address the requirement to improve access to bank loans, some countries had begun to create intergenerational lending schemes to allow the elderly to access finances in order to acquire housing or to establish a small business.

Mention was also made of the various social, recreational and cultural activities undertaken to address isolation and loneliness of the elderly in communities. Day-care centers had been established and governments, civil society and faith-based organizations collaborated to offer activities on a regular basis to the elderly in need. Emphasis was placed on intergenerational and community-related activities. To address marginalization and discrimination, the meeting expressed a need for enhanced efforts to educate the public on matters of ageing.

Matters of growing concern in the Caribbean were life-style related diseases, such as hypertension and diabetes and their impact on the quality of life of the elderly. Disability rates were high among this age group and women were generally found to be more affected by life-style related diseases and related disabilities. Officials expressed concern about the growing need for adequate health care provision; the lack of adequately trained persons in the health facilities; and the inadequate resources to cope with the growing need for long-term care of those affected by these ailments. While primary health care was free in all Caribbean countries, a major area of concern was the need to cover expenses for certain diagnostic tests and special medication not included in the free health care provision programme. Governments also reported the growing impact of HIV/AIDS on the subregion and particularly on the elderly. Many elderly had become caretakers of their grandchildren when parents either died as a consequence of an HIV/AIDS infection or had migrated abroad in search for medical care and treatment. In addition, rising numbers of persons over age 60 infected with HIV/AIDS were reported.

Representatives also underscored the role of migration in increasing the vulnerability of many older persons. While children left the subregion in search for greener pastures abroad, grandparents were often left behind to take care of their grandchildren. With respect to the free movement of people within the CARICOM subregion, there was a need to address contingent rights and the movement of the elderly.

Another matter of concern to the subregion was the need for inclusion of the elderly in disaster preparedness and mitigation plans. It was necessary for evacuation strategies and the establishment of shelters to take into consideration the special needs of older persons.

**Agenda item 8:
Working groups on ageing**

Three working groups were established to identify the major advances and challenges in the three major areas outlined in the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing:

- (a) Older persons and development
- (b) Advancing health and wellbeing into old age
- (c) Ensuring enabling and supportive environments

The deliberations of the working groups are reflected in the Caribbean position on ageing to be presented to the Second Intergovernmental Conference on Ageing for Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Agenda item 9:
Presentation of the findings of the working groups and adoption of the
Caribbean position to be presented to the Second Regional Intergovernmental Conference
on Ageing for Latin America and the Caribbean (Brazil)**

The text of the Caribbean position on ageing can be found at Annex 1.

**Agenda item 10:
Report of the Rapporteur**

The Rapporteur summarized the highlights of the discussions. He commended the willingness of the participants to share lessons learnt and to commit to overcome challenges faced at the national level with joint efforts across the subregion. He acclaimed the willingness expressed by ECLAC along with other United Nations agencies to continue to support Caribbean countries in their efforts to further implement the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing. Finally, the working groups were commended for their efforts undertaken to identify areas of success and aspects of concern common in the countries in the subregion, as an input to formulate the Caribbean position on the implementation and advancement of the Madrid Plan of Action.

**Agenda item 11:
Closure of the meeting**

The Director of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean closed the meeting by thanking all participants for their valuable contributions and emphasizing the commitment of ECLAC to support the countries of the region in their efforts to enhance the health and well-being of their elderly.

Annex 1**Caribbean Position on Ageing**

The Caribbean countries participating in the Caribbean Intergovernmental Conference in follow-up to the Latin America and Caribbean Plan of Action on Population and Development – Focus on ageing, held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, on 30 October 2007, formulated the following ‘Caribbean Position on Ageing’:

(a) Recognizing that the International Conference on Population and Development along with its follow-up conferences in the Caribbean has set out the path to address population ageing in the Caribbean.

(b) The adoption of the Madrid Plan of Action in 2002 and the adoption of the Regional Strategy for the Implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing in Santiago in 2003, along with the First Caribbean Symposium on Population held in 2004 have further enhanced the recognition of population ageing in the Caribbean.

(c) The context of demographic transition is well underway in the Caribbean. Nevertheless the situation varies from country to country: while some countries are considerably advanced, others are at a rather incipient stage.

(d) The process of population ageing is a result of fertility decline and rising life-expectancy, the latter a result of improved general health and living conditions in the countries of the Caribbean. Thus, ageing constitutes a success story for the countries in this subregion.

(e) The fact that the populations of the Caribbean are ageing poses numerous challenges to the countries of the Caribbean. While this transition was much slower in the developed world under rather favorable socio-economic conditions, countries in the Caribbean are struggling with the consequences of these rapid demographic transformations under far less favorable socio-economic environments.

(f) Caribbean countries also recognize the unique opportunity the present demographic conditions, with declining youth dependency rates and still rather low old age dependency rates, offer. The resulting reduction in the burden posed on the working age-population allows for unique investments in pension schemes and social protection plans for the working age population to ensure coverage later in life.

(g) The general goal of this position is to identify priorities for the continued implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing in the Caribbean:

1. Older persons and development

Development involves not only a country's growth in economic terms, but also the availability and accessibility of goods and services to all members of society in the context of security and dignity.

i. Old age represents not only an achievement in age, but also stands for the continued contribution of older persons to the socio-economic and cultural development of their countries. Intergenerational understanding and social cohesion, beginning at the community levels and reaching out to various national bodies and institutions, are of critical importance. Religious and cultural groups also play a vital role in this regard.

ii. The role of the elderly as mentors, guides and resource-persons in various informal and formal settings is a critical and a vital component of Caribbean culture.

iii. The protection of human rights of older persons and the creation of conditions for economic and social security, social participation and education that promote the inclusion of the elderly and the satisfaction of their basic needs are a major concern for the subregion.

iv. The need to provide opportunities to gain income through own work as well as to secure social protection for those in need is considered an utmost priority.

v. Gaps exist in coverage through pensions and social welfare schemes with respect to gender and former employment status. Generally women and those in the informal sector experience more difficulties in benefiting from such schemes.

vi. Gender gaps regarding access to work and social security do exist in the subregion, particularly due to the fact that women are traditionally the caretakers of their families, many were not in a position to continue formal education to grant access to the formal labor market and later to contributory pension schemes and other social service schemes.

vii. In order to bridge these gaps, the following recommendations for action were formulated:

- a. Provide a framework for establishing 'societies for all ages' in the countries in the Caribbean by encouraging the cooperation and collaboration of the main stakeholders in education, culture and religion inclusive of government and non-governmental entities.
- b. Enhance the role of the elderly as social and cultural mentors in formal and informal settings through cultural activities involving young and old as well as various socio-cultural groupings.

- c. Create and sustain employment opportunities for older persons to secure sustainable incomes and livelihoods.
- d. Include the rather sizable informal sector into formal pension schemes. Further, establish non-contributory pension schemes for those not covered by the formal mechanisms. Investigate into possible indexation of pension and social security payments needs to adjust benefits to the rising cost of living. Further, overcome bureaucratic hurdles that make accessibility to pensions quite often a challenge to those who are entitled.
- e. Improve financial allotments in the national budget to programmes supporting the elderly.

2. Advancing health and well-being

Health in old age is the result of the life-styles people have adopted throughout their lifetimes. Conditions and practices in younger years with regard to general health care, sexual and reproductive health, physical and recreational activity along with nutritional customs have a strong influence on health and quality of life enjoyed in older ages.

i. The granting of free access to primary health care in the Caribbean has been one of the main contributory factors to the enhancement of the physical well-being of its citizens leading to gains in life-expectancy throughout the Caribbean.

ii. Caribbean countries are recognizing the impact of changing life-styles on the health and well-being of their citizens. This shift from contagious diseases to chronic diseases demands adjustments in the provision of long-term care to those in need. Gender-based differences in these ailments are an area of major concern and need to be addressed with utmost urgency.

iii. More training on ageing and health and geriatrics is needed to equip health-care providers in institutions, but also within the family with adequate tools to provide the quality of care needed by the elderly.

iv. While educational levels are high and training and capacity building in the area of health care provision are widely available, trained professionals often leave the subregion for greener pastures abroad and are no longer available to provide the care to those in need in the subregion.

v. Also iterated was the requirement to enhance outreach and community care possibly through the establishment of mobile health care facilities.

vi. The need to make quality and timely health care services available was emphasized along with the recognition that health care and medication for special needs, such as

chronic diseases, was not always readily available and often out-of-pocket payments were needed.

vii. Prevalence of HIV/AIDS among persons over age 60 is on the rise in the Caribbean and the need to include HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment into health care programmes for the elderly was expressed.

viii. In order to bridge these gaps, the following recommendations for action were formulated:

- a. Promote healthy lifestyles at all levels of society through education at schools and public information campaigns via domestic radio and TV networks.
- b. Enhance training of health care workers and care providers in institutions and in the family framework in the area of elderly care and geriatric to ensure timely and quality care provision.
- c. To respond to the growing need for nursing homes and long-term care provision, Governments need to engage in the formulation of a regulatory framework to ensure that quality standards of care to the elderly are provided in public and private care facilities.
- d. Promote the inclusion of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment into health-care programmes throughout the subregion.
- e. Address the continued outflow of health care providers from the Caribbean, the improvement of working conditions, benefits packages and career perspectives.
- f. Strengthen community health care services and/or utilize available mobile care facilities which can facilitate access to health-care to elderly in remote areas.
- g. Identify mechanisms to ensure equal access to health care services, inclusive of special treatments and medication to poor and particularly the vulnerable elderly.

3. Enabling and supportive environments

i. The creation of suitable physical, political, social, economic and cultural conditions for older persons is essential for social development and the exercise of rights, duties and freedoms during old age.

ii. The role of migration in heightening the vulnerability of the elderly in the Caribbean was underscored. Migration burdens the elderly with additional family responsibilities. At times younger elderly are left behind with the responsibility for older elderly in their families and they also have to bear the burden of raising grandchildren with little or no financial and social support from family members abroad.

iii. Another area of critical concern is the need for inclusion of the elderly in disaster preparedness and mitigation plans. Evacuation strategies and the establishment of shelters need to take into consideration the particular requirements of older persons.

iv. While many elderly own the dwellings they are living in, these buildings often do not meet the requirements for livability, safety and accessibility. Access to support in cash and kind is needed in order to provide the means to upgrade their accommodations to allow the elderly to grow old in their familiar and comfortable environment.

v. Some public spaces are not equipped to provide accessibility for older persons, particularly for persons with ailments and disabilities. Granting of access to public buildings and affordable public transportation is essential to allow the elderly to access and benefit from the public services available.

vi. The protection of human rights of the elderly and prevention of discrimination and elder abuse in physical, psychological and cultural terms is recognized as important to ensure ageing with grace and dignity.

vii. Informal social networks are an essential part of the culture of the Caribbean and are therefore important factors for the well-being of the elderly in this subregion. While women seem to be more able to establish and maintain such networks, men in older age quite often find themselves excluded from such networks, since most of their networks were formed at the working place and not extended and maintained into retirement.

viii. In order to bridge these gaps, the following recommendations for action were formulated:

- a. Promote initiatives that permit older persons' access to support in cash and kind to either acquire their property or to refurbish the dwelling to meet established safety and security standards.
- b. Improve access to public buildings and enhance the usability and affordability of public transportation to ensure equal access to and benefit from public services available.
- c. Foster the inclusion of the elderly and their specific requirements into national and regional disaster preparedness and mitigation plans, inclusive of providing for the elderly in shelters established.
- d. Provide legislation to combat various forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of elderly, in accordance with constitutional and general human rights provisions.
- e. Create awareness programmes that highlight the positive contributions older persons have made to the development of their nations to fight discrimination of

older persons and to promote their inclusion into all aspects of social and political life in their respective communities and across their countries.

- f. Promote the formation and maintenance of informal networks for elderly men and women through family, faith-based and cultural organizations within and outside government institutions.
- g. Recognize the specific impact of migration on the elderly in the subregion, particularly with regard to their enhanced role as care-takers of grandchildren, but also of older family members. Promote the establishment of mechanisms to assist the elderly bearing such family responsibilities.
- h. In the framework of regional integration, particularly in the context of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) there is a need to streamline social policies and programmes and to allow for the transfer of acquired pension and health care benefits across the subregion. Further, there is a need to share best practices amongst the countries in the subregion and the UNFPA and CARICOM reported to have started a joint initiative to this effect.

Annex 2**List of participants****A. Member countries****ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA**

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E. ECLAC system

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