

10 October 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
on the International Day of Older Persons**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am truly honored to join you today in celebrating the 22nd International Day of Older Persons.

I would particularly like to thank the NGO Committee on Aging for putting together this fantastic event, and for its most noble work as well as CUNY for hosting us this morning.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm not exactly the oldest person to occupy the office of President of the UN General Assembly. But I have a very strong sentiment towards the elderly. In fact, I don't think I could have made it here without the incredible support provided to me by some very special people who were generations beyond my own age my grandparents.

It is impossible to fully articulate the influence they had on shaping my life and how I see the world.

Last week, my grandmother celebrated her 91st birthday back in Belgrade; I still seek her advice on a whole host of issues. As a matter of fact, I talked to her this morning over the phone.

She instilled in me a sort of ethical compass that I can only hope I have been able to follow as consistently as she has throughout her long and eventful life.

By her example and the many stories she so graciously passed down to me, I have learned that morality and the prudential exercise of judgment should always be at the forefront of one's reasoning.

The creative energy and passion of youth evolves over time into the wisdom and insight of the elderly. This is how families are strengthened, and how generations are bridged. It is why we should see life as a continuum, and never downplay the role older persons can play in our individual development, as well as that of our nations.

The truth is old age does not start at sixty or seventy or some other arbitrarily decided milestone. Aging is a lifelong process. Today's young are tomorrow's older persons. This is why I believe that everyone has a stake in promoting the development of what the UN calls a "society for all ages."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world's rapidly aging population is an unprecedented demographic phenomenon. The increase in human longevity means more and more of us are leading healthier, increasingly productive lives. There is no doubt that we should celebrate rising life expectancy as one of humanity's major achievements. At the same time, this transformational change in the planet's demographics poses a number of new challenges that we will need to confront.

Today, there are 760 million people over the age of 60 living across the world, with 65% of them residing in developing countries. By 2050, statistics project that number will have risen to approximately two billion.

In my view, demographic issues like this one must be incorporated into the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. Here is where I believe the General Assembly can make a real difference, for it has been tasked to implement much of what has been agreed by world leaders this past June in Rio.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ten years ago, the General Assembly adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging. This important document remains the UN's only multilaterally-agreed blueprint for guidance on the subject of Aging. I hope that the second review process, which is now underway, will encourage UN Member States to strengthen their efforts to build a society for all ages, by more fully adopting and implementing the recommendations contained in the Plan of Action.

For older people to enjoy longer, healthier, and more secure lives, I believe we will need to embrace a more equitable, holistic approach to meeting their particular needs.

One of the most important topics we need to address is older persons' human rights. Despite their specific vulnerability, there is no dedicated protection regime for them. I believe that taking steps to combat age discrimination, neglect, abuse and violence, as well as addressing social integration and healthcare matters, is critical and I will be pushing them on the General Assembly's agenda.

The General Assembly has an open-ended working group on aging, which was established in 2010. I thank Argentina for chairing this group, and would like to reassure you that as President, I will do my utmost to make sure its concerns are placed high on the agenda.

Its work and that of the NGO Committee on Aging means a great deal not only to the UN, but to me personally. I look forward to learning more about your plans and initiatives, and want you to know that you can count on my full support in carrying them forward.

I truly thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning.