



UNITED NATIONS DPI/NGO CONFERENCE
“We the peoples...Together Finding Global Solutions
for Global Problems”
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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I would like first to thank the United Nations Department of Public Information and the NGO/DPI Executive Committee for organizing this 67th Conference, the principal NGO event at the United Nations.

The past two days have seen an amazing variety of events that have showcased the work of non-governmental organizations around the world.

I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to all of them. NGOs have had a remarkable history of reaching out to, and helping, those left furthest behind. NGOs have worked, with few resources, to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, to protect the environment, to end discrimination, abuse, exploitation and violence, to provide food and shelter, to protect the human rights of people of all ages. Sadly, some of those working in NGOs have been persecuted and some have even died while protecting the rights of others.

The current President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miroslav Lajcak, has called for a “multilateralism renaissance”, and an end to a “me-first” world in which challenges are not just daunting, concerning or alarming, but in fact they have become scary. We now live in a world of water and food crises, cyber attacks, terrorism, global financial crises, pandemics, threats of nuclear war, and increasingly catastrophic weather events. In order to find global solutions for global problems, the GA President called for real engagement, meaningful dialogue, collaboration, coordination and compromise. We must pay attention to this.

The 2030 Agenda also calls for interconnectedness and inclusion - at the state as well as individual levels. We need trust, transparency and accountability.

When legislation, policies and programmes are enacted, we must demand that the focus must first be on the impact of such decisions on people. We must not only think about those we want to benefit, but also about those who may be negatively impacted. **One group should not lose out at the expense of the other. Governments must take a life-course approach, from cradle to grave.**

- Do young people go hungry? Yes. Older persons too.
- Do young people find it difficult to access affordable health services? Yes. Older persons too.
- Do young people suffer from discrimination, violence and abuse? Yes. Older persons too.

- Do young people find it difficult to get a job? Yes. Older persons too.
- Do young people contribute to their families, their communities and to the economic health of their country? Yes. Older persons too.
- At what age is a person of no value? At what point in a person's life should she or he be considered of no consequence?

A life-course approach would require Governments, and all of us, to ensure that **ageism does not rear its ugly head**. We must fight ageism with intergenerational action, collaboration and inclusion.

Perhaps we should do away with the word "ageing" which has negative connotations. Instead we should be celebrating "longevity", since many older persons are now healthier, more active and more productive than ever before.

At the same time, we must not ignore the fact that for many older persons around the world, living longer is a time when they are considered of less value, when they are ostracized, ignored, abused, neglected or abandoned. And we must prevent that from happening **if we believe in the rights and dignity of each human person**.

Young people certainly would not want to lose, when they get older, what they are now fighting for. And older persons certainly do not want their children and grandchildren to have their hard-fought rights denied when they are older, or to fall back into

poverty and neglect. I was young once and believed I could change the world. I am now 77 and I still believe I can change the world!

And a word of warning to all us, we must be vigilant about not slipping backwards on any of the rights we have gained along life's journey.

I read somewhere recently that civil society should be less civil – meaning we must make more noise and demand economic and social justice, the protection of human rights, respect for the rule of law. Have we been too quiet and governments have not heard us, or are they just not listening?

NGOs are not only watchdogs, they are also implementers and partners.

As we leave this Conference, let us all pledge to create societies where **all people of all ages** are able to contribute, prosper, enjoy their rights and live a life of dignity. **From cradle to grave. There is a lot of work for us to do. Let's get moving! And do not forget to use the power of your right to vote!**

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