

**(Prepared for the IFA Hyderabad Conference, June 2014)**

**I am pleased to share with you the work we non-governmental representatives do at the UN in general and our current activities. I want to tell you what non-governmental means, what we can and cannot do at the UN and why it is so important that we are there, what it means for you, here in the ground and in your various activities wherever you work and at what level you work.**

**To begin, non-governmental means exactly what it says: we are not in any government, at any level, from the ground up. We are citizens, we are activists, we are participants in the life of our community and national entity. We are part of what is known as civil society, community organizations, various types of groups interested in the communal and social fabric of where we live and raise families and educate our children, earn our wages, and elect and pay our public officials and their staffs and helpers.**

**To get to be a recognized official NGO at UN headquarters – and be able to wear the tag that identifies us such, comes after a long and laborious application and hearing process of the Economic and Social Council’s Commission on NGOs. The application process for the organizations that want official NGO status begins with the UN asking questions: why do you want this role, what does your organization do that will benefit the UN, what have you accomplished already, what are your financials, how do you raise your funds, how long have you been in existence, and so on, in order for the applying organization to prove worthiness, conduct their affairs in an ethical manner, and so on. It also involves supplying financial data, publications, listing who are the heads of the organization, etc. in addition to the documentation already alluded to. The process can take at least one year, and often takes two years before certification, which also designates the level of certification. There are certain privileges with the designation such as being able to attend all meetings of the UN unless listed as closed, except for the Security Council sessions which are always closed to NGOs unless specifically invited. We are invited to make statements at some sessions, for example, for the Commission for Social Development, which meets annually in New York: there are opportunities for NGO’s to sign up to present a position paper in the**

session. There are also opportunities to submit statements well ahead of the sessions which then become part of the Commission's documents. We can also distribute our statements, invitations to meetings, publications, et al, on tables in the room, accessible to the diplomats as well as other NGO's. The diplomats' statements are also provided for public distribution. We like to gather these up for future reference and for distribution to Board members for follow up on particular issues. We can secure various types of documents from the various UN agencies and units, even for example, the reports from the Secretary General of the UN on various topics.

What are some of the specific activities of IFA at the UN? IFA has been part of the NGO Committee on Ageing since we became a member some forty years ago. We participated in the First World Assembly on Ageing, held in 1982 in Vienna, Austria. That conference provided IFA with the inspiration to develop and then in 1989, present to the United Nations, a Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Older Persons. This document was reviewed by the General Assembly, debated and then, in revised form, was passed as a Resolution in December 1991, as the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. It is still in effect today, and in my judgment, is the platform for a United Nations Convention on the Human Rights of Older Persons. There will be resumed sessions of the Open-Ended Working Group on this subject in August of this year. You can see that we will continue our very busy schedule at the UN the moment we return to New York after this conference concludes!

The NGO Committee on Ageing at the UN has been part of many significant activities at the UN over the years. For example, during the IFA Chairmanship of the CoA, we were deeply involved in the development of the conceptual framework for the 1999 International Year of Older Persons, in the 2002 Second World Assembly on Aging held that year in Madrid, Spain, when 162 governments gathered and 4000 NGOs from around the world held an

**International World Forum at the same time, in a building near to the palace that held the participating countries. We welcomed the then Secretary General of the UN who happily celebrated his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday with us at that time.**

**We have always participated in the meetings and deliberations of other NGO Committees who function as we do, representing various groups and organizations: we are members of NGO Committees on the Family, Mental Health, Migration, Social Development, Women, Human Rights. It is our intent and mission to keep issues, needs, concerns of older persons in each of these committees. In the CoA itself, IfA is very active in its subcommittees on older women, elder abuse, intergenerational relationships, and microfinance for older women. I share this information with you to indicate the breadth of the IFA activities at the UN and how important it is that we share this with you, in this forum as well as in earlier ones, through our newsletter, our website, and the journal on Global Ageing.**

**I cannot finish today without reference to the issue that has been occupying us for the last year. This is about the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, successor to the MDGs, the Millennium Development Goals established by the General Assembly in the Year 2000 at the initiative of the then Secretary General Kofi Annan. The aim of that initiative has been to set priorities to reduce extreme poverty, secure primary education for all children, improve maternal health care, reduce infant mortality, secure rights for women, and encourage inter- country cooperation and partnerships. Many goals have been at least partially reached. However, it has been agreed that much more needs to be done, including issues of the environment, covering all of the issues occupying much of the world today. In addition, people are considered at the heart of the issues, as before. But as before, with the MDGs, so far, there is very little reference to older persons, despite the fact that the population of older persons globally will continue to grow until at least 2030. Some demographers have**

**stated that the population of older persons will continue to grow until 2050, and that there will be fewer persons, under the age of fifteen than over the age of 60.**

**It has been most challenging to interact with the members of this Open Working Group on post- 2015, as it is called, to secure interest, let alone any commitment, to the inclusion of older persons in the 2015 document in terms of its targets and goals. We are in coalition with other NGOs such as Helpage International, AARP, Age Concern, to bring the issues and the need for inclusion of ageing issues to the member states and to the ultimate document. Together, we hope we will have played a substantial part in securing recognition of older persons worldwide. We hope that there will be cognition of older persons as resources, not burdens!**

**There is still much work to be done, with little time. It is very important that you, in your organizations on the ground, in academia, in all aspects of civil society, be knowledgeable and interested and concerned enough to help in this very important endeavor. There are things you can do in your own communities. My colleague, Valerie Levy will share with you some of the very concrete suggestions you can consider to help in this important, yes, critical work.**

**Thank you.**

**Helen R. Hamlin**

