



# ASI Newsletter

A special Issue in commemoration of International Day of Older Persons

## ASI Observes International Day of Older Persons

For the first time since the United Nations designated 1<sup>st</sup> October as International Day of Older Persons some 20 years ago, Ageing with a Smile Initiative (ASI) observed the day in The Gambia this year. Events organised to mark the day took the form of a press conference and a free screening exercise for the elderly. The conference was attended by up to 15 journalists drawn from both print and electronic media including the national television.

During the press conference, ASI briefed journalists on the situation of the elderly in The Gambia and the efforts being made by the community-based

organisation to improve the health and welfare of the elderly in the country. Speaking at the occasion, Balla Musa Joof of ASI called on family and community members to revive positive traditional values such as caring for the elderly in our homes. He noted that changes in our life styles are impacting negatively on the wellbeing of the elderly. The theme for this year's International Day of Older Persons is: "Older persons and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals".



## International Day of Older Persons 1 October 2010



Ageing with a Smile Initiative  
*Supporting the elderly to lead healthier and dignified lives*



*An advert produced by ASI for  
International Day of Older Persons*

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Free screening for  
hypertension,  
diabetes and visual  
acuity for the elders  
of Sukuta

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## UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message on International Day of Older Persons

This Day marks the twentieth anniversary of the International Day of Older Persons. Older persons play an invaluable role in all societies — as leaders, caregivers and volunteers — yet are also vulnerable to discrimination, abuse, neglect and violence.

The United Nations has long fought for the rights and well-being of older persons, and to make their voices heard. On this year's observance, we celebrate hard-won achievements, especially those related to the Millennium Development Goals. In many countries, older persons have benefited from reduced rates of poverty and hunger, improved access to medicines and health services, and greater education and work opportunities.

Yet, progress has been uneven, as it has been for the Millennium Development Goals overall in all countries and regions. For example, in those countries hardest hit by the AIDS pandemic, it is often grandparents who are left to care for AIDS orphans. In sub-Saharan Africa, 20 per cent of rural women aged 60 and older are the sole supporters of their grandchildren. These caregivers, who take on added and often unexpected responsibilities, typically with little or none of the necessary resources, desperately need social services, especially social pensions, so that they and their families have a chance for life beyond mere survival.

The number and proportion of older persons is growing rapidly. In the past three decades their numbers have doubled. By 2050, the global population of older persons will total 2 billion — a significant shift in the world's demographic profile with implications for us all.



On this International Day, I call on Governments to do more to address the needs of older persons. The key interventions are well-known: granting universal access to social services; increasing the number and worth of pension plans; and creating laws and policies that prevent age and gender discrimination in the workplace.

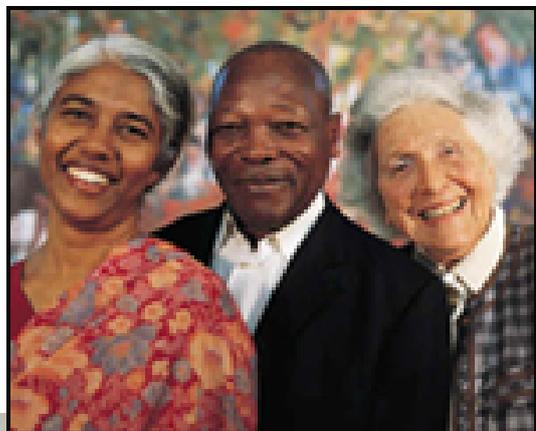
With five years left before the 2015 Millennium Development Goals deadline, it is time for Governments everywhere to institute the financial, legal and social protections that will lift millions of older persons out of poverty and ensure their rights to dignified, productive and healthy lives.

# History of International Day of Older Persons



On December 14, 1990, the UN General Assembly designated October 1 as the **International Day of Older Persons**, following up on initiatives such as the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, which was adopted by the 1982 World Assembly on Ageing and endorsed later that year by the assembly. The International Day of Older Persons was observed for the first time throughout the world on October 1, 1991.

In 1991 the UN General Assembly adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. In 2002 the second World Assembly on Ageing adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing to respond to the opportunities and challenges of population ageing in the 21st century and to promote the development of a society for all ages.



International Day of Older Persons is a special day for older persons all over the world. In many countries, politicians make speeches, particularly those responsible for government departments that focus on the welfare of the elderly while the media (radios, televisions and newspapers) publish interviews with senior citizens on various issues such as achievements they made to create a better society.



United Nations  
**Programme on Ageing**

*towards a society  
for all ages* 

## ASI and partners conduct a free screening and consultation for the elderly of Sukuta

As part of activities organised to commemorate International Day of Older Persons in the Gambia, ASI conducted a free health screening and consultation for the elderly of Sukuta. The exercise which was conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Sheikh Zayed Regional Eye Centre and Pakala Clinic was held on October 2 at Sukuta Health Centre from 10:00am to 5:00pm.

The elders came out in large numbers. The programme started in the morning with prayers, which was followed by a brief introduction of ASI and the objective of the screening and consultation exercise. A short health education was done on lifestyle management, diet and diabetes.



*Volunteers taking the vital signs of elders at the screening session*

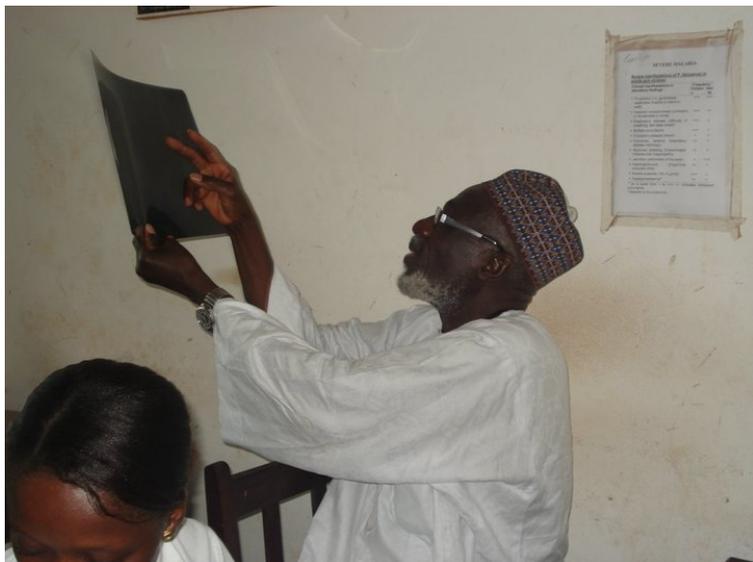
A total of 138 elders were screened (92 females and 46 males). The result of the screening showed that 45 elders had very high BP, thirty (30) had moderately high BP and the rest had normal reading. Through history taking thirty-eight (38) were confirmed to be known hypertensive while others had normal and isolated systolic hypertension of old age.

The elderly had varying health complaints including the following: twenty (20) cases of arthritis, fifteen (15) cases of epigastric pain, fifteen (15) of respiratory tract infection, twenty-five (25) cases of eye problem, three (3) case of urinary tract infection, four (4)

cases of premature cataract, three (3) cases of asthma, two (2) cases of hyena problem, seven (7) case of glaucoma and three cases of diarrhoea. All the cases were treated and 4 were referred for further management.

Members of our research team were also on the ground to interview a sample of the elders on a range of issues including their health seeking behaviour, health complaints, access to health care and their frequency of taking exercise- such as taking a walk. These interviews are part of a bigger survey that ASI is conducting to help design appropriate interventions aimed at improving the health and welfare of the elderly in The Gambia.

*A member of the research team conducting an interview with an elderly*



Dr Ibrahim Malick Samba, retired WHO Regional Director for Africa took part in the screening exercise and was actively involved in screening the elders. Speaking to reporters at the end of the exercise later, he said that the efforts being made by ASI are commendable. He observed that the elders appreciate the services rendered by the organisation. He used the opportunity to call on all, especially the private sector and NGOs to support the work of the initiative. Dr Samba has expressed keen interest to work and support the efforts being made by ASI. He will be joining the organisation in subsequent community-based screening exercises in the Greater Banjul Area.

**On top:** Dr Samba examining an x-ray film of an elderly patient during the screening and consultation session.



**Below:** Dr Samba talking to reporters at the end of the screening session

## ASI supports flood victims

In response to the appeal made by The Gambia Government to support families affected by the floods and windstorms this year, ASI made a modest donation of D2500 to the National Disaster Management Agency at a ceremony held at the Office of the H.E. the Vice President, Dr Aja Isatou Njie Saïdy on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2010 . A strong delegation of ASI comprising Lisa Ceesay, Ousman Badjie, Pa Modou Faal and Balla Musa Joof made the presentation.



*Members of ASI with representatives of other organisations at the presentation ceremony*

Speaking on behalf of ASI at the presentation ceremony Mr Joof commended the Gambia Government-NDMA for the swift response to the floods and the effective coordination efforts. He expressed ASI concern on the situation of the affected families and made an appeal to family and community members as well as the NDMA to pay particular attention to the elderly because of their vulnerability during emergencies. Mr Joof used the opportunity to present the Vice President with ASI's first annual report.

Other organisations that made donations at the presentation ceremony were: The Jammeh Foundation for Peace, World

Mission Agency and Action Aid The Gambia. After receiving the donations, Mr Essa Khan, the Executive Director of NDMA and the Vice President thanked the organisations on behalf of the Gambian leader and the affected families. They noted that everything donated is worthwhile and will go a long way in supporting ongoing relief efforts. The Vice President thanked Gambians for their massive response with regards to their supports towards what she described as a worthy course. She noted that a lot has been done so far but a lot more is needed as people lost their household belongings and homes.

## Courtesy call on the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

A high powered ASI delegation comprising Ousman Badjie, Pa Modou Faal and Balla Musa Joof made a courtesy call on the newly appointed Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2010 at her office in Banjul.

The PS, Mrs Matilda Bouy was joined at the meeting by her deputy, Mr Karim Sonko and the Chief Nursing Officer, Margaret Gomez. They listened to the ASI delegation with keen interest and were full of praises for the members for coming up with this indigenous initiative. They commended ASI for the efforts being made to support the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and expressed their willingness to support and partner with the organisation.



*Members of ASI with the PS Health (in the middle) and her team*

During the meeting, they made several suggestions for ASI to look into issues such as setting up a day-care centre for the elderly. The CNO has a wealth of experience managing the home for the elderly and had travelled to other countries such as Taiwan where she learned innovative ways that elders are cared for. She expressed her willingness to work with ASI to support the elderly.

At the end of the visit, the ASI delegation shared a copy of ASI's first annual report with the PS and also used the opportunity to inform her of the UN designated day for the elderly - i.e. the International Day of Older Persons. The delegation requested for the Ministry to make an official statement on national radio and television in commemoration of the day.

## ASI Organises a fundraising dinner



*Members of ASI serving the elderly at the dinner*

On September 25, 2010, ASI organised its first fundraising dinner at Leybato Hotel, Fajara. The dinner was attended by over a hundred guests including 10 elderly people. The event was not just about eating and drinking but key personalities like Dr Ibrahim Malick Samba, Dr Lamin Sidibeh of the University of The Gambia and Mr Fallou Sowe of the Department of Social Welfare were also in attendance and they all spoke on the situation of the elderly in the country and the need to support them. A popular Gambian artist, Balla Ranks and a local DJ entertained the guests. Proceeds from the dinner will be used to fund more community-based screening activities and other events for the elderly.

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Ageing with a Smile Initiative is a new drive launched in The Gambia in January 2010 by the Hon, Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Dr Abubacarr Gaye. The initiative aims to improve the health and general welfare of the elderly in the country.

If you are interested in supporting the work of the initiative, contact us through the following means:

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ASI is a registered charitable organisation in The Gambia |Registration No.465/2009