



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE  
**BOLLETTINO**

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**INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE ALLA CONFERENZA MINISTERIALE EUROPEA  
SULL'INVECCHIAMENTO (BERLINO, 11-13 SETTEMBRE 2002)**

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Dall'11 al 13 settembre corrente, si è tenuta a Berlino, sotto l'auspicio della Commissione Economica per Europa dell'Organizzazione delle Nazioni Unite, una Conferenza Ministeriale sull'Invecchiamento.

Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento che il Capo della Delegazione Pontificia, S.E. Mons. Diarmuid Martin, Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'Ufficio delle Nazioni Unite ed Istituzioni Specializzate a Ginevra, ha pronunciato giovedì 12 settembre:

**• INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. DIARMUID MARTIN**

Too often, today, longevity and ageing are classified as problems. Longevity is rather is a gift of God, to be enjoyed and utilized fruitfully. In most parts of our world, longevity can be said to be a characteristic of our times. Older people have therefore the right to be able to realize fully the capacities and the talents they possess and to take their rightful place within society.

On their part, society and the institutions of society – including the private sector – must assume a more coherent role in ensuring that an adequate framework exists within which people, as they grow older, receive the support they need to remain active protagonists. We have not yet taken fully into consideration the broad significance of the demographic changes which will arise from increased longevity in Europe.

The programme of action proposed by this Conference stresses the need to foster a more positive image of older people. We must recognise our societies as multi-generational societies, to which older people belong not just on the margins. Social recognition should not be linked solely to economic productivity. The inalienable dignity of each older person does not depend on his or her apparent utility.

Changes in family patterns in many European countries have led to a greater isolation of older people. The drop in birth rates is in part be due to an individualist trend in current social philosophy, as a result of which decisions concerning the number and spacing of children take less into account the responsibility of families towards the

future of society. A similar individualist understanding of the human person can reduce the capacity of the family to carry out its role in intergenerational solidarity.

It is difficult to establish the correct balance between a stress on the individual's right to personal fulfilment and the obligation of solidarity. Solidarity however always brings with it a price. Social policy must be structured in such a way that intergenerational solidarity – a fundamental value of human society – is not rendered impossible because too costly. In a situation in which multi-tiered private/public alliances will be needed to sustain pension funds, it is important that the sufficient safeguards be introduced to guarantee fundamental rights and needs of the elderly in the face of market fluctuation.

Older people will of course have special needs concerning housing and a living environment adaptable to their various conditions. Care and assistance should be available to people where they wish to live, if possible close to the environment in which they have spent most of their lives and close especially to their family.

The fact of widespread and growing longevity will demand not just structural changes in our societies but also in the choices of persons. Many problems which the elderly face are in fact the product of incorrect life-style choices earlier in life, concerning unbalanced diet and nutrition, lack of exercise and lack of recourse to simple preventive health measures.

In ensuring that older people are facilitated in remaining autonomous and active for the longest possible period, greater stress should be placed on educational structures, such as Universities for elderly people, as well as neighbourhood groups and other associations, which provide intellectual stimulus and address also the particular spiritual needs of older people.

A truly multi-generational society is one in which older people feel that they fully belong, in which their dignity will always be fully protected, in which they need not fear, and in which their contribution will be respected and their wisdom appreciated.

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