

THE IFA – ITS ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons) congratulates the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) on its 35th anniversary. We share a long history together, and thought an appropriate gift might be to give you an account of our collaboration, which coincides with the early years of IFA's development. With moves by the IFA secretariat from one country to another and several changes in the leadership of the organization, even some of IFA's members may know very little about the organization's background. This brief history covers the period between 1973, when IFA was created, to 1993 when the IFA secretariat moved to Montreal, Canada, from Washington, DC, where it had been located at AARP headquarters for much of its previous history.

IFA's origin lay in the growing awareness by the early 1970s that population aging caused by lengthening life expectancy and reduced birth rates was a phenomenon common to developing and more developed countries alike. At the time, the United Nations (UN) was beginning to take an interest in aging as the result of the work of its own demographers.

AARP in the early 1970s, under the leadership of its then director, Bernard Nash, was seeking to find a useful role it could play internationally. After consulting with leaders of non-governmental organizations in other countries representing or serving older persons, AARP joined with them in a meeting in London in December 1973 to found the International Federation on Ageing.

Although these organizations came from countries that were at very different stages of economic and social development, they were united by a common concern for the well-being of older persons. They all believed that voluntary organizations could play an important role in the field of aging; that membership in an international organization would strengthen the effectiveness of those groups in their own countries; and that, because they were at different levels of development, they could learn from the variety of experiences in different countries. Further, by joining an international organization, they could speak with a united voice at the UN. National non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had no standing at the UN or its family of organizations. Only governments and international NGOs could participate in the discussion and formulation of UN policies and programs.

These values continue to drive IFA membership and activities to this day.

AARP agreed to fund the organization and host its secretariat at its headquarters in Washington, DC, for several years in order to give the new organization a strong start. Bernard Nash became IFA's first president. Subsequent presidents were: David Hobman of Age Concern England; Robert Prigent of CLEIRPPA in France; Sharad Gokhale of the Community Aid and Sponsorship Program in India; Daniel Thursz of the National Council on the Ageing in the USA; Yitzhak Brick of ESHEL in Israel; and, of course, Irene Hoskins of the USA. General Secretaries during the 1974-1992 period included E.R. Marlin, William Kerrigan, Richard Johnson, Sally Greengross, Cliff Picton, and Charlotte Nusberg.

With a small staff, IFA quickly went about its work. A quarterly newsletter, *Ageing International* (AI), was launched to promote the international exchange of policy and program

information about aging. Workshops and symposia on aging issues were organized within others' international conferences in order to raise awareness about the needs of and opportunities presented by older populations.

Relations with the UN

Most importantly, within a few months after coming into being, IFA was one of the first organizations to call for a World Assembly on Ageing (WAA). Through the persuasive efforts of member organizations with their national governments, the necessary momentum and resources were mobilized to make the first WAA possible in 1982. IFA's General Secretary at the time, William Kerrigan, became Secretary-General of the World Assembly—the first time in UN history that a representative of an NGO had become the director of a single-focus world conference. The WAA produced the world's first International Plan of Action on Ageing.

The IFA went on to obtain Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the International Labor Organization, UNESCO, and other international agencies, and to lobby in support of aging issues in each of these organizations.

A number of volunteers have ably served as IFA's main representative at the UN, but none more so than Helen Hamlin, who has served almost two decades in this role—a position she filled when IFA was still housed at AARP!

The Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities of Older Persons

In another significant activity, the IFA developed a universal *Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Older Persons* (1990) to be used as a national and international discussion document and model. With the assistance of key allies in the UN, particularly Dominican Republic Ambassador Julia T. de Alvarez, the rights part of the declaration was first adapted and then adopted by the General Assembly as the *UN Principles for Older Persons* on the eve of the 10th anniversary of the first World Assembly on Aging (December 1991).

In 1992, IFA was awarded a Testimonial by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali for its work on aging, and IFA awarded Amb. Alvarez the first IFA President's Award in 1992 for her contributions to older persons of the world.

Publications

IFA's publications program expanded too under Charlotte Nusberg's leadership. From the beginning, IFA sought vigorously to keep its membership and others interested in aging informed about public policy developments around the world, as well as research findings, particularly those with practical application. *Ageing International* (AI) became the main vehicle to carry out this mission. It evolved from a newsletter to a quarterly report published in several languages. AI reported on program innovations and new ideas in service delivery, research results in social gerontology, developments in aging policy, and actions by the elderly on their own behalf. Now, AI, of course, has become a full-fledged journal, appearing under the name of *Global Ageing*.

The periodical was supplemented over the years by a host of other publications examining particular aspects of aging policy in greater depth, but always from a cross-national perspective. Among early titles were: *Aging in a Changing Village Society: A Kenyan Experience*; *Focus on Day Centres*; *Rethinking Worklife Options for Older People*; *Empowering Older People: An International Approach*; and, together with AARP, *Older Women Around the World*. Throughout these publications IFA sought to encourage the cross-cultural and cross-national adaptation of programs and policies for older persons.

Networks

On its own or in cooperation with AARP, IFA established three international networks of experts in areas significant to IFA at the time. All of these organized conferences and workshops and published newsletters or monographs during their existence.

The first, the *Global Link on Midlife and Older Women*, was an informal network of activists, practitioners, planners, and researchers in many nations. Working with international women's associations and aging organizations, the Global Link served as an advocate for aging women everywhere. England's Sally Greengross, then IFA General Secretary, served as a coordinator of the Link, while Irene Hoskins, who now serves as IFA's president, was the responsible staff person.

The second network, the *International Network for Older Persons in Employment*, explored work-related issues as they affected older persons.

The third, also developed by Sally Greengross, was the international network *EAGLE* (Exchange on Ageing, the Law and Ethics) composed of lawyers, physicians, social policy experts, and other professionals concerned about how the law served older people. It pressed for legislative change and sought to influence the legal profession's agenda.

None of these networks are now active.

Skills Exchanges

Perhaps one prototype for IFA's recent activity to strengthen organizations concerned with aging issues in developing countries was the *Skills Exchange Program*, developed by IFA in 1984. Members in more developed countries made their expertise available to member organizations in developing nations. Skills exchanges took place around the subjects of day care for frail elderly persons and modern concepts of childcare for older caregivers of grandchildren.

Conferences

Starting in 1992, IFA felt strong enough to begin holding its own international conferences on a broad array of topics of interest to older persons and their advocates. All were designed to provide a more direct forum for the exchange of ideas and viewpoints among researchers, practitioners, and representatives of older persons from the public and private sectors. The first took place in India; these conferences have since continued on a biennial basis in venues around the world.

IFA's international conferences remain unique in their ability to appeal to all these key players.

These early years were not without challenges! Among these were continuous efforts by AARP to move IFA to greater financial independence and less dependence on its host. The secretariat did, in fact, move away from AARP headquarters several times—to England and to Australia—but it always eventually returned to Washington. IFA's close relationship with AARP was sometimes seen by critics as detrimental to the independence of IFA. In reality, there was never a conflict of interest, and IFA's leadership operated quite independently of that of AARP. Nonetheless, for the continuing health of IFA, a "separation" agreement was concluded in 1992 that resulted in IFA's move to Montreal the following year and the end of dependence on any one member organization.

By this time, the IFA had grown to over 100 member organizations from some 50 nations, about equally divided between developed and developing countries. Since that time, IFA has continued to grow and serve as an authoritative source of information on developments that affect the status and well-being of the elderly people all over the world. With older persons representing a continuously increasing proportion of the world's population, the role of the IFA as a catalyst for the promotion of national and international understanding of the humanitarian and developmental issues related to aging should become all the more important. AARP is honored to have served as a catalyst for IFA's birth and to have had such a long association with the organization. It remains a member of the IFA and has continued to collaborate with the organization in recent years around specific projects.

TIMELINE OF AARP's COLLABORATION WITH IFA

1972	1973	1974	1975-1981	1978-1992	1982	1983	1984	1984-85	1986	1988
AARP sends E.R. Marlin to meet with NGO leaders abroad to explore international needs in aging	Founding of IFA; Bernard Nash elected as IFA's first President, E.R. Marlin approved as first General-Secretary	Start of <i>Ageing International</i> periodical	Active lobbying for 1st UN World Assembly on Ageing	1) IFA provides the aging focus in many international conferences; 2) IFA undertakes an active publications program	Participation in 1st UN World Assembly on Ageing (WAA); Wm. Kerrigan, IFA's General Secretary, appointed Secretary-General of the WAA	IFA secretariat moves to London	Skills Exchange program launched	1) Obtains Consultative status with WHO, ILO and UNESCO; 2) IFA and AARP launch the International Network on Midlife and Older Women	International Network on Older Workers and EAGLE launched	IFA secretariat moves to Australia

1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1995	2001	2006	2007	2008
IFA secretariat returns to Washington, DC	Release of IFA Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities of Older Persons	UN General Assembly approves Principles for Older Persons based on IFA Declaration	1) IFA holds its first international conference in Bombay and Pune, India; 2) Presents the President's award to Amb. Julia T. de Alvarez	IFA secretariat moves from Washington, DC to Montreal, Canada	1) <i>Ageing International</i> is transferred to Montreal, Canada; 2) AARP participates in IFA's 2nd international conference in Jerusalem	IFA and AARP jointly organize the celebration of the International Day of Older Persons at UN headquarters	AARP serves as a sponsor of IFA's biennial conference in Copenhagen	IFA Secretary-General speaks at first of AARP's UN Briefing Series, and provides background paper	AARP participates in IFA's biennial conference in Montreal