

**Speech for Bob Gilbert,  
Chairperson of Cavan Older Persons Forum  
Special signing ceremony of the Dublin Declaration  
on Age Friendly Cities & Counties  
Thursday, 27th November 2014**

We don't stop participating because we grow older, but we may grow older more rapidly because we stop participating. This I hold to be true. It has been borne out in numerous studies carried out over the past years, which show the positive effects on the well-being, quality of life, mental health and longevity of older people who participate in volunteering activities. By participating as a volunteer older people can enhance social support networks, increase social status and reinforce not only their own knowledge and skills but those of others.

The WHO Age Friendly Counties and communities programme affords older people a unique opportunity for participation – participation at local community level, municipality, county, regional and national level. It affords us an opportunity to have our voices heard in places where they have never been heard before. It affords us the opportunity to participate in the decision making process within our local authority areas.

Our voices are now being heard loudly and clearly throughout the land via our Older Persons Fora or Councils, which are being set up in all local authority areas. They are being heard through our participation on bodies such as Public Participation Networks. Older Peoples involvement in Local Community Development Committees gives us a voice in the creation of Local community and economics plans for our areas. Other opportunities for participation exist on Local Authority Strategic policy Committees. Most important of all our voices are heard on the Local Authority's Age Friendly Alliance, where we sit not as protagonists, not as lobbyists, but as equal partners with CEO's and decision makers of statutory agencies such as the Local Authority, HSE, ETB, An Garda Siochana and other bodies.

Developing a county age friendly strategy is perhaps the foremost vehicle for older people's participation. We take part in a consultation process that involves conducting age friendly audits of local communities, focused workshops that concentrate on issues confronting older people and their suggested solutions, and

the compiling and analysis of questionnaires on these issues. These consultations are for the most part peer driven and conducted.

We have heard many times politicians and others bewail the dwindling resources within our country. Yet there is one resource in our nation that is not only *not* dwindling but is actually increasing. I refer of course to our increasing older population who are indeed a valuable asset and not a liability as some would try to make us believe. Here is a part of the populace who have survived two or more recessions- some of whom may not have had great formal education, but who have been through the University of Life. We are people who have built up a wealth of knowledge and experience while attending that university of life. That knowledge and experience is not being utilised to its fullest and our country is the poorer for that. Of course there is now a new cohort of older person emerging who are better educated, more widely travelled and with greater exposure to the technological advances that our world has experienced. These assets should not be left untapped by our communities, our NGO's or our Government, but opportunities should be afforded them to continue contributing and utilising their skills for the benefit and enhancement of all our people. Harnessing the skills, knowledge and experience gained by older people throughout their lives will bring benefits to the individual, to the community and the whole nation.

There are challenges to Government and politicians, to NGO's and community organisations to conceptualise new social roles for older people, which would be of benefit for all our people. I now issue a further challenge to politicians. I challenge them to properly resource the creation of age friendly environments – to resource the creation of safe and sustainable communities and to resource our Older Person's Councils. I also urge them to fully implement without any further delay the national strategy for positive ageing. I finally challenge them to engage with and work with us so that we can together participate in building a nation where every citizen, irrespective of age, colour, class and creed, level of ability or orientation can live in safety, in harmony and with dignity.

**ENDS**