

**"The Graying of Nations III: Productive Aging Around the World"**  
**Hearing of the Senate Special Committee on Aging**  
**Statement of Sen. John Breaux, Ranking Member**

Aging is much more than just a national phenomenon -- it is international. This hearing brings together some of our foremost experts on global aging to highlight why aging issues are truly international in scope. Our three panels will give perspectives on the role of the United States in international aging policy, international policies and programs which promote active aging, and the role of biomedical research in promoting active aging.

Today's hearing is the third one held by the Aging Committee on the topic of global aging issues. The first two were held in 1977 and in 1985. This one in 1998 is the most crucial, since nations all over the world will soon be faced with challenges posed by increased life expectancy.

Each year in the United States, May marks the nation's annual celebration of Older Americans Month. For over 30 years, the President has designated May as the official month for celebrating the extraordinary contributions of our older citizens. Today, older Americans number more than 34 million, and the number is far higher in many other nations.

The theme for this year's Older Americans Month was "Living Longer, Growing Stronger in America." Our hearing this afternoon highlights the fact that many of us all over the world are living longer, fuller, more satisfying lives. And we are growing stronger in the process. It gives us an opportunity to learn from other countries.

There is a growing recognition throughout the world that the aging process can and should be a positive experience where people can take charge as they prepare for the future. All of us can point to examples of older citizens in our countries who have remained active long past the point of their retirement. International advances in the broad fields of medicine and health care and science and technology will continue to help older people make a real difference everywhere.

Here in the U.S., we are truly at the beginning of a demographic revolution. When Older Americans Month was established in 1963, only 17 million people had reached their 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. Today, our nation is growing older at an unprecedented rate. There are now over 33 million individuals age 65 or older living in the U.S. By the year 2030, it is expected that this segment of the population will more than double to 70 million. Similar demographic trends are also driving reforms in other countries.

Whether we attribute our increasing longevity and aging population worldwide to reductions in infant mortality, decreases in fertility rates, fewer cases of diseases, or improvements in nutrition, education, and technology, the good news is that more and more people throughout the world are living longer, more productive lives. The graying of nations will impact virtually every segment of our global society - our economic systems, technology, health care systems, our workplaces, social services, and public policy.

I thank all of our witnesses for being here today to help us better understand international aging. And Sen. Glenn is to be commended for calling the session based on his experience with the previous two "Graying of Nations" hearings. This hearing and The "Living Longer, Growing Stronger" theme of this year's "Older Americans Month" will serve as good starting points for the International *Year* of Older Persons in 1999.