

## FOREWORD

The 21st Century has dawned with the hopes of millions of people around the world for peace and prosperity. Millions of older people have rejoiced at having made it through to the New Millennium. For millions of others, the New Millennium is no different to the old as they continue to bear the burden of poverty, conflict and disease.

We have an individual and a collective responsibility to replace despair with hope, to build a caring society as part of a caring world. Older people in our society deserve no less.

South Africa is taking part, for the first time as a democratic state, in this significant forum. The government and all the people of South Africa hope that through this Report, South Africa will share its experiences as a young democracy and thereby contribute to the development of international and national policies and programmes that will enhance humanity's goal of building a world of all ages

Following the first democratic elections in 1994, the newly formed government put in place policies and programmes to address poverty and to protect the most vulnerable sectors of our society, which included large numbers of older persons. Poverty eradication has remained the central focus of our Government and many of its efforts have been focused on responding to the needs of older people in the South African society.

In his State of the Nation Address this year, President Thabo Mbeki posed a central question "...whether what we are doing as the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, is helping to lift from the shoulders of our people, the intolerable burden of poverty and underdevelopment".

We are progressing steadily, but we are mindful of the many challenges we still face in making a meaningful impact and difference to the lives of older people. We remain steadfast in our commitment to improve the social, economic and general well-being of older persons in our country and to building a society for all ages.

On behalf of my Government, I would like to thank the many individuals, civil society structures and volunteers for their invaluable contribution to making a difference in the lives of older persons in our country. To the Mothers and Fathers of our nation, we thank you for our freedom.



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