

POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE GLOBAL YOUNG ACADEMY'S 8TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF YOUNG SCIENTISTS

Creating a World Friendly to All Ages

PREAMBLE

In May 2018, young scientists and researchers from more than 50 different countries came together at the Global Young Academy Annual General Meeting and International Conference for Young Scientists in Pattaya, Thailand, to discuss a pressing global issue: the challenges and possibilities for sustainable and healthy aging.

Most countries in the world are experiencing gains in life expectancy. Indeed, about 600 million people worldwide are currently aged 65 and over, and by 2050, the number of 65+ year-olds is expected to be 1.6 billion.¹ In some countries, it is now more likely than ever before that three or four generations will overlap. While there is certainly good reason to discuss rising global life expectancy as one of humanity's success stories, it can also result in a burden on the individual, the society and the environment broadly considered.

WHAT ARE THE MOST PRESSING ISSUES?

Some of the most pressing issues relating to aging were highlighted at the conference during presentations by GYA members, Thai scientists and other speakers:

- New relationships with technology: robots taking care of the elderly, changing digital communication infrastructures, smart cities/farms/homes, health apps.
- Urbanisation and mobility: migration, safe and accessible public transport, rural isolation, safe housing and healthy outdoor spaces.
- Changing family and care relations
- Climate change: natural resource destruction, resource consumption, food security, pollution, waste, weather.

¹ *United Nations World Population Prospects, the 2017 Revision.*

- Global health: healthcare services, mental health issues, disease burdens across generations, importance of neonatal health.
- New patterns of global economic growth, financial security and population growth

SUGGESTIONS FOR A HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE AGING FUTURE

Based on discussions of these issues at the 2018 conference, the GYA offers the following suggestions for how to build a healthier, more sustainable and successful aging future.

1. AGING POPULATIONS AS A GROWING GLOBAL RESOURCE

Old age should not be synonymous with decline and frailty. In striving for a society that serves, supports and cares for all age groups, chronological age is just one factor that may provide information about prospects, abilities and preferences. We should also cherish older adults as agents for passing down family history, cultural heritage and expertise in many disciplines, and thus strive for communities where older adults are respected, and their knowledge, skills, resources, and contributions are sought out and valued. The way we think, feel and act towards age and aging makes a difference and impacts our own aging process as well as the aging process of other members in society.

2. THE GLOBAL AND LOCAL ARE INTIMATELY CONNECTED

The international breadth of presentations and discussion that is characteristic of the GYA and its gatherings showed not only the commonality of issues concerning aging, but also the insights to be gained globally from local practices, beliefs, values, strategies, technologies and interventions. Similarly, research showed that no regional change occurs in isolation - in a globalised world, any local demographic shifts, technological change, economic growth, disease patterns and so forth will affect us all.

3. A COMBINED EFFORT REQUIRED

The meeting included presentations from linguists, chemists, neonatologists, historians, sociologists, public health scientists, psychologists, economists, epidemiologists, and immunologists. Aging was discussed as a cellular process, a historical concept, a source of innovation, and a global health concern, to name a few. To make any advances in thinking about aging societies, we will need to draw from all of their thinkers and practitioners, working across and within disciplinary perspectives, theories and methods, in dialogue with industry, start-ups, the arts, and other voices.

4. NEW PERSPECTIVES NEEDED

The most creative, sustainable, effective ways of addressing issues of aging will require thinking, speaking, and research from new spaces. To date, research, policy and debate have been too concentrated within European and North American centres. The GYA's 2018 conference highlighted how vital it is to rethink these centres of discussion: to compare from and across the Global South; to listen to young scientists emerging from outside traditional disciplines; and to consider new ways of evaluating, communicating, financing and structuring scientific research and careers. Some of the most innovative ideas about aging in the future will come from places not even considered yet.

SUMMARY

We started this statement with the latest numbers and statistics concerning an aging society. However, aging cannot be summarised in numbers and statistics alone. We must recognise that healthy aging happens in communities where aged members form part of the fabric of the community in their cities and villages and are seen as respected sources of wisdom. Environments impact aging but are also shaped by aging. Creating an age-friendly world is economically and socially beneficial to people of all ages and abilities.

We are scientists who recognise the importance of working together across all ages to help make an age-friendly world to grow up and grow old in. To make any headway we have described how we need to look closely at the situation on local and global levels, and how they can be better linked. We also need to consider what aging is and could be from a range of perspectives and new spaces. The GYA is well placed to not only take a central role in these discussions but also inspire others to take charge of this age-friendly future.

ABOUT THE GYA

The GYA was founded with the vision to be the voice of young scientists around the world. By empowering early- to mid-career researchers to lead international, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational dialogues, the GYA mobilises talent from six continents for capacity-building, mentoring, engaging in science policy and improving the existing research environment. Members are chosen for their demonstrated excellence in scientific achievement and their commitment to service. Currently, there are 200 GYA members and 216 alumni from 83 countries. The GYA Office is hosted at the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina in Halle (Saale), Germany.