

ITEM 14D: SPECIFIC GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS
(D) OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

AGEING AND THE RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS

This statement was endorsed by the following **non-governmental organizations** in consultative status with ECOSOC:

International Association of Gerontology, Society for Psychological Study of Social Issues, International Council of Nurses, Indigenous World Association, International Association for Counselling, Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association International, Worldwide Organization for Women, World Movement of Mothers, International Council of Women, International Council of Jewish Women, World Union for Progressive Judaism, international Catholic Association for Girls, World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations, World Federation of Methodist Women, Women's World Summit Federation, The Federation of American Women's Club's Overseas, Institute for Planetary Synthesis, International Federation of Associations of Elderly, International Inner Wheel, Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, International and Interreligious Federation for World Peace, International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education and International Federation of University Women, Zonta International

We call the attention of the Commission to the urgent need to recognize the rights of older persons and mainstream ageing issues in the agenda of the Commission.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan referred to population ageing as a "silent revolution" and stressed the importance of older persons¹:

*"The world is undergoing an unprecedented demographic transformation. Between now and 2050, the number of older persons **will rise from about 600 million to almost two billion**. The increase will be greatest in developing countries [...]...where numbers are **expected to multiply by four**. [...] In less than 50 years from now, **for the first time in history, the world will contain more people over 60 years old than under 15** [...]"*

Therefore older persons are no longer a minority, they are *becoming a growing majority!*

Despite these facts and the progress in some UN documents, ageing is still absent on the agenda and priorities of the UN and of the Commission on Human Rights.

We call your attention to the following developments:

Beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and encompassing the numerous International Instruments² there are many references to the Rights of all. But not until the Declaration on Social Progress and Development in 1969 is there mention specifically of old age (*in Article 11*).

It took until 1982 for the UN to adopt the *1st International Plan of Action on Ageing in Vienna*, and until 1991 for the General Assembly to promulgate the *UN Principles for Older Persons (Resolution 46/91)*³.

We saw then in 1995 the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights finally adopting for the first time the *General comment no 6 on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Older Persons* (Doc E/1996/22, Annex IV).

Only a few steps were taken since:

- in 1999, by endorsing the Conceptual Framework during the International Year of Older Persons, (*Doc A/50/114*)⁴,
- in 2002 the 2nd World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid (WAA) adopted unanimously a *Political Declaration and an International Strategic Plan of Action on Ageing*.

Both of those documents include clear objectives and actions to be taken:

- ◆ to ensure the Rights of older persons,
- ◆ to protect older persons from "neglect, abuse and violence" in all situations addressed by the UN (*paragraph 07 and seq.*) and,
- ◆ to recognize "their role and contribution to society".

¹ 2nd UN World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid in 2002

² including the Covenants on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, on Civil and Political Rights as well as the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

³ with 4 main themes: independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment and dignity

⁴ This document is based on the Plan and Principles and include 4 priority areas (a) The situation of older persons, (b) individual lifelong development, (c) the relationship between generations, (d) the interrelationship of population, ageing and development.

However, It is obvious that these precedents are not enough to give older persons their Rights as well as recognition of their contribution to society.

It is clear that older persons are unrecognized and increasingly excluded and discriminated; just to cite a few examples:

- (i) HIV/AIDS pandemic: *the contribution of older persons is vital today*, their right to care for orphaned grand-children and children in general – especially older women - is an unestimated contribution benefiting the socio-economic development as well as the human reconstruction of society, restoring an identity, transmitting higher values and life skills.
- (ii) Migration: *younger generations migrating from developing countries without solid welfare systems* leave behind them older women and men with no social, economic and family care support, thus increasing their vulnerability, isolation, poverty, discrimination and lack of health care. On the other hand, serious discussions are going on to delocalize and rationalize older age health care solely for economic gain.
- (iii) The Information Society: *exponential technological development increases the generational divide*: in the 4 to 5 generation society we live in, the 2 older generations are too often excluded and affected by the digital divide, making them “digital homeless”. Older persons are the first victims of a development framework adapted primarily to younger generations and productivity imperatives;

In addition, other situations remain unaddressed: older disabled persons, older migrants, older working poor, older refugees or displaced persons, older victims of conflict, war or disasters, older prisoners, older tortured and abused persons, etc., but also key issues such as gender equality in old age, access to health, right to dignity, respect of the cultural and spiritual life until the end of life...*and after all, when you think about it, each one of us is concerned or will be one day concerned...*

In all issues, the *Right to Development* must carefully take into account old age and the generation-specificities of development over the life span until the end of life.

What is missing is the recognition that older person have Rights, but also need to be empowered to carry out their important role and contribution to cohesion and peace in society and nations worldwide.

Therefore, we call upon the 62nd Commission on Human Rights and request to keep in mind when developing new procedure and modalities of work of the Human Rights Council :

- **to mention explicitly the Rights of Older persons as an item or sub-item**
- **to appoint a special Rapporteur or similar function dealing specifically with the Rights of Older Persons**
- **to mainstream ageing in all relevant issues of the future Human Rights Council**