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Substantive inputs on the focus area of the 11th session of the General Assembly Open-ended Working Group for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons namely "Access to Justice" for older persons.

Introduction- Access to justice is "the ability of low and middle-class families to get the legal help or information they need"¹ it encompasses the need to advocate for people who cannot afford lawyers, but also focuses on the inadequacies and limitations of the legal aid system especially as it affects the elderly in the society today. This is moreso against the backdrop that most of them cannot access the justice system in the society having contributed for many decade to the development of the nation which is something that is often forgotten by our society.

Background- Globally, faced with an ageing population, State and Federal Governments have acknowledged the need to implement strategies to address the diverse needs of older people in the community. One of those needs is the ability for the elderly to be able to access the justice system at ease. However, there has been little research or specific attention to their access to justice and legal needs. The importance of addressing the legal needs of older people is underscored by the fact that older people are identified as a group who are socially and economically disadvantaged.

More than 5 billion people live outside the protection of the law including the elderly all over. Not enough progress is being made to ensure justice is accessible to those who need it. Non Governmental Organisations and civil societies believe government and all civil societies must do more to create effective means for the legal and social empowerment of people and elderly specifically.

Challenges Regarding Access to Justice -The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) Goal 16 promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Target 16.3 promotes the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all. However this goal is far from being attainable because of challenges. The challenges in accessing justice for the elderly include difficulties in accessing legal aid, lack of specialised legal services for older people, lack of resources in community legal centres to tailor their services to the needs of older people, lack of knowledge about obligations, rights and procedures, physical incapacity, concern of cost of litigation and lack of referral points and gaps in sources of information. Technological barriers, particularly for telephone and web based services.

¹ (Michael Dempster, "Justice for all", *Canadian Bar Association National: Legal Insights & Practice Trends* 22:2 (March 2013) 12. Online:

Remedies and Accountability

It is important to underscore the fact that access to justice is undeniably an important barometer for assessing not only the rule of law in any society but also the quality of governance in that society. This brings to focus the present agitation of the Nigeria government for transparency, accountability and good governance as an effective panacea for socio-economic development for all. The main legal framework for access to justice in Nigeria is the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended). Section 34,35 and 36 provides for the rights of an individuals but this has been influenced by several global and national normative instruments and framework.² While justice itself is an elusive concept it implies equity and fairness and for there to be meaningful access to justice, there must be some element of fairness and equity in the system to guarantee the realization of basic fundamental rights.

Poka Health Care Foundation is proposing a proposal that lays out areas of delivering justice for the elderly. These are; reformed and modernised legal system so that they are responsive, innovative, inclusive, people-centred and should uphold human rights.it must be an Independent legal support system that is community-based. Delivering access to justice is critical to the full implementation of SDG 16 and the wider 2030 Development Agenda of the United Nation. Throughout the programme, Poka Health Care Foundation will amplify the voices of the elderly in the grassroots and engage with heads of state and policymakers to help drive access to justice,development, social justice and economic growth.This programme also include training, empowerment and sensitization of the elderly.

Conclusion .

The time is right for a new push to deliver justice, corrupt judicial officers may very act as serious impediments to the attainment of justice even where the infrastructures and legal instruments are well structured.It is our positive duty to ensure equality of access to justice for older people and it will require reasonable adjustment, befriending policy makers and support Aides to community base centres initiatives for a far more reaching impact.