

Red Cross of Serbia

OEWG11: Way Forward – Statement

Over the past three days but also over the past year and through my work in the Red Cross, of Serbia it became clear that COVID-19 crisis has acted as a magnifying glass that made shortcomings and gaps in access to human rights for older persons much more visible. I am not talking only access to health, social protection and financial security, protection from discrimination and violence but many other rights guaranteed to everyone regardless of their age. Furthermore, access to information and education was very much reduced to older persons struck by mandatory movement restrictions and the digital divide. Their voice was silenced, ironically, at the same time when the society pledged to do everything in its power to preserve lives of older persons.

We knew ageism existed and its high prevalence but now we know its broad spectrum. We had nasty jokes on social networks, “boomer remover” hashtags and intolerance, but we also had paternalistic, patronising discourse by institutions and states speaking about preserving precious grandmothers and grandfathers’ lives while at the same time never giving them a chance to take part in making decisions that affect them.

We must use current global crisis as a wake-up call. Human rights are only as good as they serve us in times of crisis and turmoil. But, we must be aware that there are implementation gaps that can be overcome with a little more effort, but there are also normative gaps that we need to rectify by creating better policies at all levels. Protecting older persons without ever giving them a seat at the table will help no one. Human rights-wise “leave no one behind” means getting everyone to share both responsibility and benefits.

So way forward, or at least the first step is getting the New UN Convention on Human Rights of Older Persons drafted. If we truly want to protect human rights of older persons at all levels and in all settings, we must start on the bottom and listen to them but also on top and make a statement for all the world to hear. I thank you for both listening and deciding to speak when the time comes. Time is now!