

Draft statement of CEO HelpAge India at the General Discussion on 29th March 2021

Warm Greetings, My name is Rohit Prasad, I'm from HelpAge India, a non-profit working towards voicing the concerns of India's elderly since 1978.

Mahatma Gandhi said 'Be the Change, you wish to see in the world'. I call upon the international community to wholeheartedly support this Convention on Rights of Older Persons, and make this Change happen.

Population ageing has been a global concern from the 1980s; but, even today it is considered a challenge only for the developed West. The Low and Middle Income countries still think about the demographic dividend.

However, despite our perceptions, the world is changing rapidly. In the not so distant future 20% of the population in countries like India will be of older persons. A substantial number to contend with on income, health and emotional insecurities. Would it be desirable to have them dependent and a burden on society?

The gaping holes in systems the world over, especially on elder care, have been exposed by the pandemic.

We believe that every challenge is also an opportunity. This one is too! All - governments, voluntary organisations, older persons, experts, innovators, industry, investors should think about ageing and aged & all others and quicken the pace of integrating the concerns of elderly. Let's not forget that one day we all will be there! That day we would want it to feel like a blessing and not a curse!

The 'Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing' tried to change that thinking. It clearly states that elders should be treated as partners in economic development and most states in the world are signatories to the document. Despite the best efforts of the SDG principle 'Leave NO ONE Behind', the elders are last & lost.

One of the worst forms of ageism & discrimination is Elder Abuse. We were surprised to find in one of our surveys that 44% elderly reported experiencing (self/others) elder abuse in public places.

Ageism must be taken seriously, in law and in real life. The case in point is the progressive law made by the Govt. of India called 'Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007'. This path breaking legislation ensured right to life with dignity and security of elders. The litmus test for success is implementation, and we should not let societal attitude, structural and behavioural apathy, come in the way.

I would like to conclude by saying that we must all pledge to 'Build Back Better' a Society where everybody has the Right to 'Age with Dignity.'

The first step towards this, should be to draft a UN Convention for Rights of Older Persons.

The time to Act is NOW!
For if not Now, then When!
