

Age UK Statement, Presented by Ken Bluestone
OEWG on Ageing 30 July – 1 August 2014
Panel 4

Mr Chairman,

Age UK would like to thank you for the opportunity to address the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing. You have already heard from my colleague Ruthe Isden that there are considerable challenges and advances for protecting the human rights of older people in the UK. In this intervention, I will talk to the question of how effective current international agreements are in supporting action at this level.

Much attention has been focussed on the need for using existing agreements to protect the rights of older persons. Age UK agrees that every measure must be taken to do this, but let us be clear: existing agreements are not sufficient. Existing human rights instruments, on their own, do very little for articulating how human rights should be protected for older people. Non-binding agreements such as MIPAA and the UN Principles for Older Persons provide excellent guidance and inspiration that all Member States and civil society stakeholders should take into account, yet the reality is they are largely ignored by governments if there is even any awareness. I quote here from the NGO Political Declaration that was part of the UNECE 2012 Ministerial review of MIPAA:

We note "with disappointment: i) the lack of awareness of MIPAA; ii) the failure of over one third of UNECE Member States to complete reviews of MIPAA in the current cycle; and iii) the lack of implementation of the 'bottom-up' review process across UNECE Member States resulting in the almost total absence of civil society involvement in the review at the national level, where such discussions would have had greatest impact."

The lack of effectiveness of MIPAA as a policy-making tool is further illustrated by its absence from the list of agreements cited in the post-2015 SDG Open Working Group Outcomes Document. This demonstrates that MIPAA is not being recognised in practice by governments as an international policy-making

instrument. Furthermore, the post-2015 process illustrates the importance of human rights instruments for articulating policy for the rest of the UN system. The lack of specificity of older people in these instruments has meant that ageing and older people were consistently forgotten at every stage of the post-2015 process. We have made some progress in this regard, but we must emphasise that older people are not being sufficiently recognised by the UN system as a whole.

Again, to be clear, we are not arguing that MIPAA and the UN Principles should be abandoned - far from it. They offer excellent policy advice that we must take into account. But on their own, they are not sufficient.

The experience of the UN demonstrates that achieving a widely ratified consensus-driven universal human rights convention for older people will help provide this missing clarity. Our experience in the UK with the Care Act also shows us the power and the impact that the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities has had for shaping policy and that the need for a convention on the rights of older people to achieve similar policy change is real.

We urge Member States therefore to fully embrace the task ahead of them and to use subsequent meetings of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing to fulfil its mandate to "consider proposals for an international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons" as articulated in Resolution 67/139 that was agreed in 2013. We hope that this Working Group will continue to be a vital and productive forum and look forward to future discussions.

Thank you.