



Open-ended Working Group on Ageing
for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons

Fifth working session

30 July-1 August 2014

Opening statement by the European Union, delivered by Mr. Pit Koehler

Thank you Mr. Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the EU and its Member States.

The EU and its Member States welcome the holding of the fifth meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing. Let me express our thanks to the Bureau, our colleagues from Argentina, as well as the United Nations staff for their efforts in preparing this session.

Mr. Chair,

Ageing is one of the greatest social and economic challenges of the 21st century and it has substantive policy implications. As the *World Population Ageing Report 2013* states, population ageing is taking place in nearly all the countries of the world. Ageing results from increasing life expectancy - which is a very positive fact. The global share of older people (aged 60 years or over) is estimated to grow as a proportion of the world population from 11.7 per cent in 2013 to 21.1 per cent by 2050. In the case of Europe, more than 20 per cent of Europeans will be 65 years or older by 2025.

Consequently, the situation of older persons is very high on the agenda of the European Union and its Member States. We are well aware of the challenges we are faced with, including the human rights dimension. Our active participation in the previous sessions of the Working Group and our engagement during this year's session also has to be seen in this context. The sessions offer a chance to learn and to exchange best practices and policies from government representatives, experts and civil society actors. We envision that following this session, we

should all have a better idea of measures and actions we can take to concretely improve the situation of older persons in our countries.

Mr. Chair,

To share *our* experiences in more detail, the European Union will be organising a side-event on "*Monitoring care of older persons from a human rights perspective*", that will take place tomorrow, the 31st of July at 1.15 PM. There, we will draw on our experience with a concrete project on this issue that the EU is doing jointly with the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions. Another tangible example of the importance that we place on the situation of older persons is the recent conference on frailty in old age that was organised by the EU in June this year in Brussels, in the context of the *European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing*. At this conference, a range of key experts and other stakeholders came together in order to identify policy actions, recommendations and guidelines for better policy on frailty. One of the areas of particular focus for us is encouraging local authorities in Europe to adopt the WHO's framework on age-friendly environments to enable people of all ages to participate in the life of their local communities. Furthermore, in June this year, the EU adopted a report, which underlines the importance of social investment in long-term care. The report highlights that there is a need to provide an adequate social protection connected to the risks of long-term care.

Mr. Chair,

We sincerely welcome the opportunity to exchange more on regional and national efforts, building on the existing standards and policy frameworks that exist on different levels. It is important for us to note that the work of this Working Group is part of a larger discourse on ageing issues which should also take into account the social policy and development dimension. In order to mainstream the rights of older persons throughout the work of the UN, we need to ensure a regular, coherent and comprehensive discussion within the UN on ageing issues, making proper use of existing meetings such as those of the Commission on Social Development. As the protection of the human rights of older persons requires the active involvement of multiple stakeholders at all levels and, naturally, the involvement of older persons themselves, we welcome the broad and inclusive participation of civil society organisations in this session and in the discussion in general.

Mr. Chair,

In regard to the specific mandate of the Working Group, I would like to recall what has repeatedly been underlined by numerous delegations throughout previous meetings: Namely that the whole spectrum of internationally recognized human rights standards and principles naturally also covers and protects older persons without discrimination. What is more, the current international legal framework addresses many of the issues discussed in this session, namely violence, care, and financial issues. We therefore maintain that, although it is important to discuss the implementation and protection gaps, they are not of a normative nature.

At the same time we are convinced that in order to achieve concrete progress for older people, our efforts and our inherently limited resources should focus on the implementation of the existing instruments. Like many others, we share the concern about the actual situation of older persons and concur that much more attention must be paid to address the existing problems that range from abuse and discrimination, poverty and insufficient care levels, to more specific health issues and other challenges that older persons face. In our perspective, much of this could be described as human rights violations, or the lack of fulfilment of human rights.

Mr. Chair,

We feel that a broad agreement on the overall analysis of the situation of the human rights of older persons and the urgent need for improvement is evident in this room. At the same time we remain proponents of the strategy that the best and most prudent way ahead is to focus on a determined application of *existing* standards as the most effective and practical way to address the protection gaps.

This could for example be facilitated through an increased focus on age as a specific perspective when monitoring existing human rights instruments. There are various opportunities within the human rights system which particularly highlight age relevant issues such as the General Comments issued by the Treaty Bodies or joint reports of the existing Special Rapporteurs. In this regard we welcome the upcoming presentation by the newly appointed Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of All Human Rights by Older Persons at this session. We also consider that a comprehensive compilation which would assemble the existing standards in one document would be a concrete and swift way of improving the accessibility of the existing norms. Such a compilation could be equipped with indications for its concrete application. Existing compilations only provide a very general overview.

For the EU, it is important to emphasize that many protection gaps and measures are already being considered, in an exhaustive and inclusive manner, under the umbrella of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, signed by 156 countries. The Madrid plan has not lost at all its actuality and remains *the* point of reference. Its 2nd global review last year has shown that progress on the implementation has been limited. We therefore urge all relevant actors to implement it fully at the national, regional and international level. We hope that this Working Group session will build on the Madrid plan, highlight opportunities to strengthen the application of existing standards to improve the human rights protection of older persons and come up with a strong call to action on all of us to do more. We also hope that it will contribute to generating the political will that is necessary to prioritize ageing issues, including the much-needed change in mind-set, to start conceiving older persons as assets and contributors, rather than as a problem and a subject of state intervention. Looking ahead, we also recognise the relevance of the rights of older persons in the post-2015 development agenda.

Mr. Chair,

In concluding, let me also look beyond this session. We have said at the outset that we very much look forward to this meeting, and that we will be active contributors to its exchanges. It is of course of utmost importance to revisit priority issues on a regular basis and we agree that much remains to be done to fully realize the human rights of older persons and integrate them fully into society. We would like to invite you all to join the reflection on how best to ensure a regular, meaningful and comprehensive discussion within the UN on ageing issues, including through the use of existing meetings such as of the Commission on Social Development.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.