

Statement by Susanne Paul, President of Global Action on Aging
To the Open Ended Working Group of the General Assembly, July 2014

Thank you, [Chair].

My name is Susanne Paul. I'm President of Global Action on Aging, an NGO that has been active at the United Nations for many years. Global Action has long urged member states to adopt a Convention to define and protect the human rights of older persons. In our view, this is a logical and necessary step to broaden and consolidate rights in a vital area. It will respond to the aging of populations worldwide and recognize dramatic social changes in livelihoods and family structures. We must adopt new approaches to strengthen societies and to affirm and improve the lives of people in their later years.

When Global Action began our campaign for the rights of older persons, we were inspired by the effectiveness and tenacity of those advocating for the rights of *women* and the rights of *persons with disabilities*. These groups had made a convincing case for their Conventions – a need that went beyond general international instruments like the Universal Declaration. Who today would doubt the wisdom and the necessity of those new initiatives? What government today would risk the opprobrium of being opposed to those innovative Conventions?

And yet there remain prominent member states who do not hesitate to express doubts about a convention for older persons. This negotiating process has been moving at a snail's pace because some important delegations express hesitations and even outright opposition. Some such delegations took the lead in those other Conventions but they have apparently lost their appetite for pioneering and their commitment to human rights when it comes to older persons.

Today, after five years of foot dragging, it is time for the world's governments to recognize the need for a global instrument on aging. It's

time to abandon the perspective that this initiative is a cost burden to be avoided, or a legal headache to be sidestepped. It's time to affirm that the world's older people are a precious asset to society, who must be accorded the rights they need and deserve. They are our care givers, mediators, sources of social memory, repositories of joy, solaces of sorrow. History will judge those severely who turn their backs on the elderly and disregard all they have to offer. And let every single person here not forget that they will themselves be an older person eventually... If they are not one already!

I urge the delegations present to take up this great cause. Take this historic step now, in this Working Group session. Commit at long last to a Convention that we can all be proud of.

It is an exciting prospect and an achievement you can all claim proudly to your grandchildren and perhaps even your great grandchildren. You can say: I was there, I helped make it happen!

Thank you, [Chair]