



*Permanent Mission of the Republic of Zimbabwe
to the United Nations*

Note...ZNY/SOC/2

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Zimbabwe to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Focal Point on Ageing in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations and has the honour to refer to correspondence from the Secretariat in which it requested Member States to provide information on the elements that should be included in an international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons.

The Mission has the further honour to attach a document outlining the elements that Zimbabwe would like to see in the instrument.

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Zimbabwe to the United Nations avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Focal Point on Ageing in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations the assurances of its highest consideration.

Focal Point on Ageing
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
New York



CONTRIBUTIONS TO AN INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENT TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT THE RIGHT OF OLDER PERSONS

(a) Purpose

The international instrument should ensure that the rights of older persons are protected, promoted and enforced. For countries like Zimbabwe which have recently enacted legislature to enhance the care and protection of older persons, the purpose of the international instrument should be to provide guidelines for the country to operationalise provisions in the Act.

(b) General Principles

The international instrument should promote principles on independence, self fulfillment, care, dignity and participation.

(c) Definitions Of Older Persons

Currently the international arena is marked by non uniformity across and within member countries on the definitions of older persons. In Zimbabwe the Older Persons Act defines an older person as any person who is aged 65 years and above. The international instrument should provide guidelines on addressing disparities with a country and among different countries while recognizing differing financial capacities of states.

(d) Equality And Non Discrimination As Applied To Older Persons

The Older Persons Act in Zimbabwe provides for non discrimination of Older Persons based on race, ethnicity and or gender however at a regional level lack of awareness of human rights of older person, discrimination and marginalization has been identified as the major human rights challenge for older persons in Africa. Within this category older women who suffer exclusion, inequality and subjugation are worse off than their counterparts. The international instrument should facilitate the enforcement of laws against the discrimination of older person.

(e) Specific Human Rights To Be Included

Rights to health, and old age pension need to be strengthened. Social protection is a human right and the instrument should provide an opportunity for older persons to be provided with social security. Like other countries, Zimbabwe has put in place a number of social protection programmes. In our experience, the major challenge at the moment is that coverage is still very low due to limited resource constraints as most of the programmes are currently donor funded.

Older persons in Zimbabwe and other countries in similar situations still fail to enjoy rights to health in full due to the devastating effects of the HIV and AIDS pandemic that has had multiple impacts upon older people as they lose their possible source of external financial support in their old age. More social protection programmes to cushion older persons against health related issues need to be put in place to reduce the negative effects of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The rights of Older Persons to health also need to be strengthened as the current health programmes tend to be oriented towards eradicating preventable childhood diseases rather than treating chronic diseases or addressing the healthcare needs of older persons. Physical obstacles further impede access to health as health facilities are often situated too far from older persons' residence, with transport being too expensive, inadequate, or simply unavailable to them.

It is also essential that policies at national level are put in place to promote the realization, protection and promotion of human rights to ensure the participation of older persons in decision making processes on matters that affect their lives through their representation at various levels of local government from village to district level. Governments should promote the health and well being of older persons by addressing the lack of specialist services and personnel to serve the health needs of the growing numbers of older people. Free health services and medication for poor older people should remain a goal. International cooperation is needed to support countries' engagement through training and capacity development activities.

(f) National And International Supervisory Mechanisms

Priority at the international level should be geared towards mobilization of resources to increase health and social protection programmes that target older persons within Member States. In low income countries where initial donor support is necessary to establish social protection programmes efforts

must be made to create national capacity to sustain such these programmes. To ensure that the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action for ageing is accelerated, the public and private sectors, as well as civil society, must be engaged in developing approaches to meeting the needs of older persons and promoting participatory dialogue of older persons in decision making. The international instrument can come up with strategies of engaging these other sectors as part of resource mobilization mechanisms. International and intersectoral coordination mechanisms must be established to monitor implementation and to report on issues affecting older persons.

A major gap in programmes designed for older persons has been the lack of comprehensive data collection and research on the issue of ageing yet this is critical in order to address barriers such as exclusion, and lack of empowerment of older persons as well as provide the groundwork for policy making and strategies. It is essential both on the national and international levels, to embark on vigorous research and data collection for issues pertaining to the elderly and ensure that data is aggregated according to sex as well as to recognize rural and urban differences. Engagement with academia and research institutions in this regard should be encouraged and strengthened.