



Statement by the International Council on Social Welfare, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

Open-ended Working Group on Ageing: Fourth working session
12-15 August 2013, New York, UN Headquarters

Esteemed delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am speaking on behalf of the International Council on Social Welfare—a non-governmental organization devoted to promoting social welfare, social development and social justice worldwide. The ICSW fully supports the establishment of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing by the General Assembly through its resolution 65/182 aimed at strengthening the human rights of older persons. Better understanding of the current situation as it pertains to the human rights of older persons, as well as a clearer vision of potential options and existing trade-offs, helps in an evaluation of further steps required to overcome the existing inadequacies of protection stemming from normative gaps affecting this large and growing group in society, also strengthening coherence of policy efforts at all levels.

While the situation of older persons varies from one country to another, in many cases this group remains one of the most vulnerable, often facing multiple deprivations, wide-spread age discrimination, neglect and violence. Non-implementation of the existing standards is also rampant, even though in many cases, and particularly in developing countries, those standards are themselves quite low, remaining inadequate for the effective protection of older persons. Further efforts on the part of the international community aimed at clarifying the scope and content of human rights norms are not only highly desirable but also can give an important boost to upholding the principle of dignity, leading eventually to higher standards—a goal of great significance to older persons everywhere. The ICSW works on the ground throughout the world to promote such standards, which we believe benefit not only older persons but also society at large.

In this light, we at ICSW would like to reiterate our support for the elaboration of the Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, as well as such measures as the establishment of a new position of a Special Rapporteur to study and report on the situation of older persons. This goal remains of a paramount importance. At the same time we believe that every effort should be made to consider a variety of policy instruments and measures that could serve as an important bridge and precursor to the Convention. Finding new approaches may require dedicated efforts and creative thinking from all stakeholders, and particularly foresight, flexibility and political skills on the part of delegates. The ICSW also supports regional efforts, including African, European and Inter-American initiatives aimed at closing the normative gaps in the protection for older persons.

The social protection issues remain especially important for the ICSW in our activities at the national and international levels. We support and actively advocate for the Social Protection Floor Initiative (SPF) framework endorsed by the International Labour Conference in its Recommendation 202 in 2012. The SPF initiative recognizes the rights of everyone to social security and to a standard of

living adequate for the health and well-being of all persons and their families. Basic income security should be guaranteed by means of basic old age and disability pensions, along with universal access to essential health services defined according to national priorities.

We would like to draw the attention of the delegates to the fact that the Special Rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty underscored, in her comprehensive report, that older persons are over-represented among those living in extreme poverty and that the absence of adequate legal frameworks for underpinning non-contributory social security schemes seriously threatens the enjoyment of human rights (A/HRC/14/31). The Special Rapporteur recommends that human rights principles and standards should be integrated throughout the design, implementation and evaluation of social pensions. It includes, *inter alia*, the adoption of specific measures to ensure access, transparency, access to information, participation, and coordination among social security and health care policies. Her recommendations also draw attention to one of the most important issues worldwide—the specific needs of older women as a group that faces particular challenges, including deeply-rooted discrimination. We believe that those recommendations strengthen the social protection of older persons and should be considered by the Member States and other stakeholders, enhancing the role of older persons as a vital social resource and active contributors to their families and communities.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to present our views before the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing, wishing you all a productive session.