

## I am Véronique Ngongo Furaha, National Commissioner at the National Human Rights Commission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo ;

I have the honor to share with you the experience and good practices of my country regarding the participation of senior citizens in public life and decision-making processes.

Firstly, I want to clarify that before 2006, the DRC did not have specific legal provisions in its arsenal for the promotion and protection of the rights of senior citizens. It was only with the constitution of February 18, 2006, that the Congolese legislature, in its Article 49, mentioned a law that should be enacted to define a framework for the specific protection of senior citizens.

Unfortunately, since its enactment, no law has been passed in this regard. It was only in 2020 that a "Draft Organic Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Senior Citizens" was initiated and submitted to the National Assembly by a Member of Parliament; however, this proposal was never submitted for general debate.

Pending the adoption of these legislative and regulatory measures, there are what we call "Homes for the Elderly" in the DRC. These structures, under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs, aim to accommodate and ensure the care of senior citizens.

However, the number of these "homes for the elderly" still appears to be insufficient. For example, the city of Kinshasa has only eight auspices, of which only two belong to the State. It must be said that the inspections we conducted there have shown that these hospices are under-equipped and that public supplies of food are insufficient to ensure adequate support. Most of these structures survive only thanks to donations from individuals.

### **A. Participation of Senior Citizens in Public Life in the DRC**

Like many African countries, the DRC does not provide for public jobs reserved for senior citizens.

But, pending the adoption of legislative and regulatory measures in this regard, senior citizens enjoy the same rights to public life as all other citizens. The law does not discriminate against their participation in public life. Except for positive discrimination (as in the case of the two chambers of parliament, where the presidency is automatically awarded to the oldest parliamentarian before the final election of the bureau). Anyone over the age of eighteen can freely exercise their right to participate in public life in the DRC (the right to participate in peaceful meetings, the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of association, etc.).

The DRC has had several senior citizens in the government. The legislative power includes several senior citizen deputies and senators.

## **B. Participation of Senior Citizens in Decision-Making Processes**

Regarding participation in the decision-making process, in the DRC, senior citizens can freely be candidates or voters in elections at all levels. Furthermore, several measures are taken to enable them to exercise the right to vote. For example, they must be given priority when they arrive at the polling station and cannot queue like other voters. They also have the right to be assisted during voting in the booths.

The NHRC has also conducted monitoring during the last elections to ensure compliance with these measures aimed at protecting their rights.

To ensure effective care of the conditions of senior citizens at the institutional and governmental levels, Law No. 13/011 of March 21, 2013, establishing, organizing, and functioning of the Permanent Commission on Human Rights (CNDH), provided for a Permanent Subcommittee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other vulnerable persons, including persons living with HIV/AIDS and senior citizens, a subcommittee that I coordinate.

The complaint mechanism before the NHRC is a non-judicial means for senior citizens to obtain redress when their rights are violated. Unfortunately, we do not have statistical data on the participation of senior citizens in public life and decision-making processes.

Finally, in its 2024 action plan, the NHRC has planned to advocate before parliament for this draft law to be submitted for general debate.

We hope that this law will be adopted so that senior citizens can finally benefit from protection that meets their specific needs.