

**Global Action on Aging**  
**Statement on the Need to Strengthen Older Persons' Rights Open-Ended**  
**Working Group, August 21-24, 2012, United Nations, New York**

**Statement of Susanne S. Paul, President**

In 1998 Global Action on Aging began documenting the human rights of older persons worldwide. Our website, [www.globalaging.org](http://www.globalaging.org), contains an archive of nearly 15,000 news items and research studies that illustrate the range of human rights issues affecting older persons across the globe have endured during the past fourteen years. Specifically, GAA collected materials about older people's access to health and income support, as well as their struggle to survive in rural areas and in armed conflicts. The UN's World Assemblies on Ageing held in Vienna in 1992 and in Madrid during 2002 encouraged the formation of ageing organizations that have emerged on every continent and in many nations. Ageing NGOs began to spotlight human rights and encouraged the UN to focus on older persons' rights. And the UN and its agencies responded, particularly as Open Ended Working Group meetings have focused on older persons' issues in recent years.

GAA has posted bi-weekly reports and research on its website in English, along with short summaries written in one of the other six official UN languages. GAA recruited talented interns from distinguished universities to carry out and describe the research, making it available to readers of Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. We attracted worldwide readers, young and old alike, to the need to strengthen older persons' rights.

What did we and the UN community learn in this process?

We learned that the stigma of old age impacts nearly every elderly person, compromising their lives and sometimes threatening life itself. Older people face abuse from family members as well as governments. Often, they are afraid to complain.

We learned that governments often target elders for cuts in social benefits as a means to save money in difficult economic times. Here in the US, Social Security contributions were reduced to 10.4% of wages in 2011 and in 2012, potentially threatening the long-term sustainability of US Social Security. Greece must reduce its social security pensions by 3% of its national budget (GDP) this year. In Italy, the new government has pushed through very painful pension cuts. As the economic crisis continues, adult children are losing their jobs and often cannot help support their old parents.

In other areas of the world where poverty and hunger are commonplace and human capacity are stretched thin, GAA has learned that thieves, ranging from street gangs to relatives and caregivers, often abuse elders in life-threatening ways, undercutting their sense of safety in many societies.

We learned that medical professionals often prescribe excessive and expensive treatments to elders that leave them further incapacitated and weakened.

We learned that verbal abuse and threats undercut older peoples' confidence and self-worth, diminishing their quality of life.

In short, the great human rights standards that have strengthened the capacity and confidence of many persons—those with disabilities, those who are children or women -- are absent for those of us over age 60 years.

We know that old age can be a fruitful, engaged and enjoyable time in our lives. To reach this goal, we must insist on a human rights document that defines and assures support and protection of our rights. We want the range of protection that children, women, and persons with disabilities have already won for themselves.

Our time is now. You, the representatives of every UN Member State must act. We, the aged, insist that you guarantee and assure the human rights of old persons everywhere. Thank you.