

OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP, 11TH SESSION, 29 MARCH – 1 APRIL 2021

“THE WAY FORWARD”

Statement by Frances Zainoeddin, 1 April 2021

Distinguished delegates and fellow advocates for the rights of older persons, my name is Frances Zainoeddin, representing the International Federation on Ageing.

We have all aged 10 years, since the Open-ended Working Group first met in 2011. Close to 800 documents have been submitted for this body’s deliberations.

The General Assembly, on numerous occasions, has requested the Working Group to present proposals and measures that will contribute to promoting and protecting the rights and dignity of older persons. Where are those proposals?

The latest request from the General Assembly in its resolutions 74/125 and 75/152 was for this body to consider adopting intergovernmentally negotiated recommendations. Where are they?

The Working Group has failed to comply with those General Assembly mandates, and more importantly, it has failed older people everywhere. The inability of this body to move forward to a different stage and level of discussions begs the question about not only the process but also to what degree does this inaction reflect the Working Group’s ageist attitudes.

146 Member States indicated their support for the Secretary-General’s Policy Brief on the impact of COVID-19 on older persons. What specific actions have been taken or will be taken by those Member States to accelerate the work of the Working Group?

During the past ten years, older people have died because their rights have not been protected or respected, with current national legislation either being absent or inadequate. An update of the 2012 report prepared by OHCHR on gaps in normative standards in human rights law is now available. What else will it take to convince Member States that we are addressing an issue of human rights, not just an issue of medical rehabilitation and social welfare?

Ageing is not a problem. Ageism is the problem. Ageism is a prejudice against our future selves. Denial of the rights of older persons implies that a significant portion of humanity does not matter.

At the United Nations, international action is considered necessary when national action is inadequate. An international convention would recognize older persons as rights holders, would establish a common, global understanding of definitions and minimum standards of practice, would act as an anti-discriminatory tool, and would improve State accountability and transparency everywhere, not just in a few countries. Everywhere.

We therefore fully support Argentina's proposal for the establishment of Subgroup, comprised of experts from Member States, the Independent Expert, CSOs and NHRIs to assist the Working Group during the intersessional period to achieve its mandate.

Let us move forward.

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