

OEWGA 11-E-statement

From: International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG)

Topic: Access to Justice

Despite decades of global efforts, numerous commissions, and countless reports, older persons continue to be denied their human rights, to be treated with dignity and respect, deserving of the same rights and benefits ascribed to younger world citizens. For older persons, particularly in this time of COVID-19, justice incorporates the right to health and unobstructed access to care, and incorporation of equity and equality in the self-determination of shelter, free from the impact of age-based discrimination. Further, due to quarantine orders as well as the resulting social isolation and overcrowding, the hidden issues of neglect, abuse and violence perpetrated upon older persons have flourished unencumbered over this past year. In addition, access to criminal justice and social services has effectively been suspended. The year 2020 has especially highlighted inequities, biases, and the lack of recourse that have long been experienced by older persons, regardless of place of residence. Reporting of elder abuse is not mandated globally, with subsequent access to relief and support for the older individual sporadic at best.

The UN supports empowerment of the voiceless through the rule of law, ensuring that viable avenues of redress not only exist, but are fully functional and effective, leaving no one behind. The task before the entire global community is to hold administrators accountable to the legal processes and norms that are consistent with human rights thereby putting an end to age-related discrimination and bias. Advocacy efforts to ensure that the UN act on its commitment to the human rights of all persons, particularly older people who labored to build their communities, must be unrelenting.

Political will is a strong adversary with its impact evident in all countries, states, and entities, including the UN. Advocates for older persons have continually been stymied in expanding the age of UN survey respondents beyond 49 years of age! As the percentage of older persons increases globally, it is imperative that legislative bodies and decision-makers have access to current data. This will make it possible to better understand and develop laws and programs to meet the needs, capacities, and interests of the wide array of older adults. The effect of just laws and programs directly impacts the economic and social life of its respective community members. To ensure the justice of access to a full life for older persons is to ensure the same access for the entire community, creating an equitable and supportive environment. The world is not a silo; communities are not silos, nor are its residents, regardless of age. Science and technology have permitted a longer lifespan for some, but for this expansion to allow for a more interactive and productive global community, access to justice – the equal opportunity of access - must be inclusive of all. A convention on the rights of older persons is central to making this a reality.