

Statement for the Opening Session

11th Session of the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

Statement March 2021

By Prof. Beate Rudolf, Director of the German Institute for Human Rights

Madame Chair, dear members of the Bureau, dear Excellencies dear colleagues and friends,

I am grateful to have this opportunity to address you in my capacity as Director of the German Institute for Human Rights remotely from Berlin. The Pandemic had strong effects on all of us. We did not have a chance to meet at the Open-ended Working Group last year and it is still a challenge to have meaningful exchanges. But I am grateful for the current occasion and want to take the opportunity to thank and congratulate the Chair and whole Bureau and the secretariat for preparing the session. We also need to acknowledge the hard work from all key stakeholders between the sessions to strengthen the human rights of older persons. The 11th session is dedicated to discussing the right to work and access to the labour market as well as access to justice. We have discussed these areas on the national level with relevant stakeholders to get prepared for the session. During the discussion we identified many barriers for older persons which hinder them in the full enjoyment of their human rights. For Example, negative images of older persons make the entry into the labour more difficult after a person turned 50. Furthermore, we came to the conclusion that older persons are very often not seen as rights holders and that diversity and the different needs of older persons are not taken into account.

COVID-19 has very much put a spotlight on the rights of older persons. Older persons have been left behind, without support, lacked equal access to the health care they needed, and died alone. In particular in Germany, we witnessed measures restricting freedom of movement, personal autonomy, the right to social participation and to private and family life that had a negative impact on the health situation. Sadly, it took a global pandemic to widely expose these gaps, including the extent of stigma and age discrimination faced by older persons.

The current situation also means there is a momentum to make older persons visible, let their voices be heard, and advocate for change that can have real impact on their lives. It has been encouraging to hear so many important stakeholders speak up on the rights of older persons in the context of the pandemic. I particularly would highlight the Secretary General's *Policy Brief* as a milestone, which was supported by 146 member states and many NGOs and NHRIs. I would also like to mention the UN High

Commissioner for Human Rights and many UN Agencies which include the human rights of older person in their work – but older persons are still not a priority even-though their visibility has increased.

What we have identified in many sessions of the Open-ended Working Group and in between is that we lack specific norms which lay the basis for meaningful implementation – or in other words: We have to amplify advocacy for a comprehensive and integrated international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights of older persons to ensure a dignified life. The current system is not sufficient!

Therefore, we are here today to join our forces to collaborate in the 11th session and to find human rights-based solution for a more age-sensitive and inclusive society.

Thank you, Madame Chair!