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Madam Chair,

Distinguished Panelists,

Ladies and gentlemen!

Thank you very much for letting me share my observations on older persons' digital education and international law. I would like to support the ideas of the **Substantive Inputs in the form of Normative Content for the Development of a Possible International Standard prepared by DESA and OHCHR** the Working Paper update to the 2012 Analytical Outcome Study on the normative standards in international human rights law in relation to older persons submitted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. I am convinced that the approaches regarding the digital inclusion should enhance the normative content of older persons' rights.

Despite considerable differences among States, all societies are evolving towards an 'information society', where digital skills are essential to be a full society member. The advantages of digital inclusion have been noticed during the COVID-19 pandemic, but although the knowledge-based society is an ageing one, the older generations are its weakest links in this case.

Regardless of a country and standard of living, the percentage of people who are digitally excluded is highest for senior citizens, not only due to a lack of internet access or funds but also because of poor digital skills and low motivation to start learning.

As stated in the Substantive Input, new technologies have an excellent potential for improving access to learning opportunities. However, first people should learn how to use them.

Improving digital literacy is crucial for bridging the so-called grey digital divide. Modern society needs lifelong learning in the ICT area, as the practical usefulness of any knowledge once acquired becomes outdated very quickly.

All these matters should be considered in the context of the human right to education, understood in its broadest sense. Of course, the right to education has many faces. In this case, access to the Internet and its relevant infrastructure and affordability of devices required are essential elements, but suitable and acceptable digital education for older people appears to be a more significant challenge today.

Indeed, there are crucial soft law, two milestone regional treaties and global and regional initiatives covering ICT issues, but older persons' rights are vague in current international human rights treaties, especially their right to education, because contrary to other vulnerable groups, older persons do not have their own worldwide treaty.

Certainly, international communities have developed many regulations directly or indirectly relating to various aspects of everyone's human right to education, but older persons educational rights are difficult to identify.

We should remember that the relevant instruments were mainly adopted when the principal challenges in education focused on eliminating illiteracy and providing children with primary schooling. At that time there was no internet, so no one considered digital skills, and the problem of global ageing was not such a burning issue as it is today.

In international documents, older persons, especially those who have left the labour market, are seldom associated with education and even much less with digital issues. This is easy to ascertain when we check the Universal Human Rights Index. It does not match 'older persons' as a group of concern with the notions of 'information society' or 'computers'. The Index connects 'older people' as one of many vulnerable groups with 'education' and far less frequently with 'lifelong learning', 'information and communication technology', 'digital skills', 'digital literacy', 'digital divide' and 'the internet'. The Index confirms that the concluding observations of the human rights treaty bodies and recommendations made by States within the UPR process connect these matters with older persons to a minimal extent. For example, in last years, just a few times, the human rights treaty bodies had an opportunity to express their concern regarding older persons in connection with digital public services.

So, there **is** a need for a fresh impetus. The new binding global norms on older persons' right to education should keep pace with demographic and technological changes. They should follow the UNESCO approach focusing more on the idea of 'learning to be', also after retirement. This also means the support for civil society's initiatives, intergenerational learning and various modalities of education. They should be accessible and free from ageism because, paraphrasing, "old dogs also have the right to learn new, digital, tricks".

The new instrument would result in the consolidation of solutions scattered over many documents and raise global awareness on older persons' rights and make their problems visible. Finally, adoption of an international standard which takes into account the needs of older persons in the contemporary world, may become a win-win action. If a state respects, protects and fulfils obligations arising from provisions on older persons' right to digital education, it will get more active, better informed, and more independent society members.