



Statement to be delivered by H.E. Ambassador Milenko Skoknic, Permanent Representative of Chile on behalf of the Group of Friends of Older Persons

The Eleventh Session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons

United Nations, New York (in person meeting, GA Hall)
March 29th, 2021

Excellencies, distinguished guests, dear colleagues,

I have the pleasure to speak on behalf of the “Group of Friends of Older Persons” at the United Nations in New York. The Group is comprised of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Slovenia, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uruguay and my own country Chile.

First of all, allow me to congratulate you and the other Bureau Members for your efforts and the Secretariat of the Open-ended Working Group in organizing this session.

The Group of Friends of Older Persons firmly supports the work of the Open-ended Working Group, created by General Assembly resolution 65/182 with the clear mandate of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons by considering the existing international framework of the human rights of older persons and identifying possible gaps and how best to address them, including by considering, as appropriate, the feasibility of further instruments and measures.

Excellencies,

The increase in the number of older persons globally and the growing trend of ageing societies all over the world represents a significant change to the demographic structures of our societies and imposes a series of new changes to development and human rights.

The number of older persons is projected to reach 1.4 billion by 2030, an increase that will be the greatest and the most rapid in the developing world, and projections indicate that, by 2030, older persons will outnumber youth, as well as children under age 10, globally. Furthermore, those projections indicate that by 2050, older persons will roughly equal the number of children globally.

According to the Secretary General Policy Brief on the Impact of COVID-19 in older persons, the pandemic is having a devastating impact across the world, with a disproportionate risk for mortality and severe disease following infection, poverty, discrimination, stigmatization, and isolation of older persons.

This reality highlights the importance of recognizing that urgent attention is needed, particularly with respect to the challenges and opportunities facing older persons, especially in the field of human rights.

Madam Chair,

The legal and policy frameworks should provide more specific protections for older persons including those that will enable them to work and access the labour market, as well as to access justice. The realization of the right to work, the adequate access to the labour market, and the access to justice by older persons are a pre-requisite for living an independent, dignified life. Nevertheless, they face significant challenges: Age discrimination is evident across all stages of the employment process. Older persons suffer discriminatory treatment while employed and also in the retirement process. The older persons in our communities face high rates of vulnerable employment and lack access to training, in particular to keep up to date in ICT and various technologies.

Regarding the access to justice, there are physical barriers including the lack of accessible court buildings, transportation, waiting/seating areas, and information, especially for older people living in rural areas. The court proceedings do not consider older persons needs, the lack of affordability of legal services or free legal assistance and the excessive delays and long period that legal processes take, and therefore, restricts access to justice for older persons, who in many cases are not alive to enjoy the outcome by the time the process ends.

It is important to take actions to increase participation in the labour market of the ageing working population and to reduce the risk of exclusion or dependency in later stages of life. These actions need to be promoted through the implementation of policies such as: increasing older women's participation; sustainable work-related health-care services with emphasis on better accessibility, promotion of occupational health and safety so as to

maintain work ability; access to technology, life-long learning, continuing education, on-the-job training, vocational rehabilitation and flexible retirement arrangements; as well as, efforts to reintegrate the unemployed and persons with disabilities into the labour market.

It is undeniable that older persons can make a significant contribution to the social, economic, and sustainable development of their societies, if an enabling environment and adequate guarantees are in place. This includes investing in closing the digital divide, lifelong education, digital literacy, and digital skills in order to foster the social inclusion of older persons. In that sense, it is imperative to fully empower older persons to allow them to effectively make that contribution, becoming not only recipients of special care and social protection, but also specific rights holders and active agents and beneficiaries of change.

Designing and implementing policies and programmes, as well as devising adequate national, regional and international legal frameworks that effectively and specifically, promote the full enjoyment of the human rights of older persons and allow their full social inclusion, as well as their participation in social, economic, cultural, civil and political life, without any restraints and free from all forms of discrimination and violence, will lead to ensure their dignity, empowerment, and their ability to fully and effectively enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms, actively participating in their societies and contributing to their development.

In this regard, we welcome the adoption of resolution 75/131 “2021-2030, United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing”, which is an opportunity to bring together governments, civil society, international agencies, professionals, academia, the media, and the private sector for ten years of concerted, catalytic and collaborative action to improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities in which they live. We also welcome the adoption of resolution 74/274 on International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19, which has facilitated the work of the UN System in its coordinated response to the pandemic, and could greatly benefit the health of older persons.

Our Group firmly believes that incorporating ageing and the human rights of older persons into global agendas is essential and that a concerted effort is required to move towards a wide and equitable approach to policy integration. The task is to link ageing to other frameworks for social and economic development and human rights. Whereas specific policies will vary according to country and region, population ageing is a universal force that has the power to shape the future. It is essential to recognize the ability of older persons to contribute to society by taking the lead not only in their own betterment but also to the society as a whole, if they can be truly autonomous and independent and fully enjoy their rights. This forward thinking calls us to embrace the potential of the ageing population as a basis for present and future development.

The social and economic contribution of older persons reaches beyond their economic activities. They often play crucial roles in families and in the community. They make many valuable contributions that are not measured in economic terms: care for family members, productive subsistence work, household maintenance and voluntary activities in the community. Moreover, these roles contribute to the preparation of the future labour force. All these contributions, including those made through unpaid work in all sectors by persons of all ages, particularly women, should be recognized.

We call upon all Member States and the international community to strengthen the further implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in order to achieve its goals and to seize this instrument as a channel for the inclusion of older persons in an age-inclusive implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the attainment of all the Sustainable Development Goals, including through an integrated and multifaceted approach to improving the well-being, and the enjoyment of their rights and dignity of older persons.

To conclude,

The Group of Friends stands ready to engage in substantive discussions with other Member States and all stakeholders during this session in order to reach a productive outcome and lead a step forward in the process of development of an international instrument for the protection and promotion of the Human Rights of Older Persons.

Thank you,