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11 May 2013

Robert Venne
Social Affairs Officer
Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD)
Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
United Nations Secretariat
Room S-2979, New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr Venne

Re: Protecting the Rights of Older People

I write in support of the need for both a United Nations Convention on the rights of older people and to appoint a UN special rapporteur to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older people worldwide.

A dynamic definition of 'older people' is required as the Council on the Ageing Victoria notes. One that can be responsive and flexible to the variety of needs reflecting the diversity of older people within and between countries worldwide.

The world is ageing and in Australia as elsewhere ageism and age discrimination are rife. In my view existing Australian human rights mechanisms are inadequate for protecting the rights of older people. Examples related to paid work: there remain age barriers to continuing in the paid work force beyond 65 years of age; many older people are 'invited' to leave the paid workforce much before they intended to do so and reporting complaints of age discrimination against older people are on the increase. In terms of social protections the Australian Council of Social Service (2012) report that almost 35 per cent of older Australians are at risk of poverty and according to Ryan (2012) older women aged 70 years and over have no superannuation and lack paid work opportunities. In terms of community attitudes, our invisibility increases with age along with lack of respect: this ageism is deeply entrenched in Australia as the Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission report (2012).

We live in a world where thinking globally and acting locally are important principles for sound political, economic and social reforms and in this context an international convention on the rights of older people remains critically important for providing an adequate human rights framework for such reforms.

The specific human rights identified below I believe should be included in the Convention on the Rights of Older People. These are:

- the right to recognition and equality before the law
- the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing

- the right to dignity and respect
- the right to self-determination and acknowledgement
- the right to freedom from violence and abuse
- the right to accessible and affordable health and age care
- the right to equity
- the right to work and to be treated fairly at work
- the right to access services
- the right to accessible information
- the right to participation in policy-making, political and civil society.

In supporting the need for a United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older People and a UN special rapporteur on the rights of older people there are other steps needed.

As an older person myself having personal experience of age discrimination and ageism I unreservedly support the following recommendations required to achieve this:

- continue to support the Open-Ended Working Group on identifying gaps and instruments required
- allocate funds to ensure broader participation
- develop a Convention, informed by this process
- appoint a UN special rapporteur on the Rights of Older People to examine and report on world-wide human rights issues to the Human Rights Council and raise issues across the globe
- support the further development of international and national comparative research on ageing ensuring that the diversity amongst older age groups is reflected in the data and that gender and
- ensure culture-sensitive data and evidence from such research informs policy and decision making (HelpAge International, 2013).

I look forward to hearing the outcome of your action on this extremely important issue in due course.

Yours sincerely

Lorraine Wheeler

Cc: Dr Jane Barratt

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1. The Hon, Susan Ryan AO, 2012, *Demography is not destiny*' The Brotherhood of St Laurence lunchtime seminar, Melbourne, 8 March 2012, un-numbered pages
 2. Council on the Ageing, Victoria (COTA Vic) cited at [www.cotavic.org.au/action-advocacy/human- rights/int...](http://www.cotavic.org.au/action-advocacy/human-rights/int...)
 3. HelpAge International, 2013, *Why it's time for a convention on the rights of older people*', *HelpAge position paper* cited at www.helpage.org/researchandpolicy/rights.
 4. Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) 2012, *Poverty in Australia, 2012*.
 5. The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities cited at www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/charter, viewed 10 May 2013
 6. Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) , 2012, *Rights in Focus: Report on the rights of older Victorians*, VEOHRC, Carlton, Victoria, October 2012.