

14 May, 2013

Mr. Robert Venne
Social Affairs Officer
Division of Social Policy and Development
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
United Nations Secretariat
Room S-2979, New York, NY 10017

RE: Open-ended Working Group on Ageing – Human Rights Instrument for Older Persons

Dear Mr. Venne,

The International Federation on Ageing (IFA) is an international NGO with the mission of being the point of global connection that brings together experts and expertise in age-related fields of study towards influencing and helping to shape effective policy.

IFA is dedicated to building the capacity and capability of people, agencies, as well as cities and communities involved in protecting the rights of older people. While there is a growing global awareness to address the rights of older adults with the implementation of various regional and international Plans such as the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing it is clear from many Member States and most importantly older people that only a binding legal instrument will provide the necessary protection of the rights of older people. Only a legal human rights instrument will move beyond the status quo.

IFA is fully supportive of a single United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. The unification of an international convention addressing the particular vulnerabilities of discrimination and rights violation as a result of ageing is essential.

The call for action for an international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons is timely. IFA has identified the following pressing issues that are cardinal to this discussion.

- Discrimination based on age is one of the greatest and last frontiers in the area of human rights. Ageism remains the underlying motive that denies older adults of their basic human rights, access to services and programs, and the right to live and prosper with dignity. It is with this instance that IFA believes a common vocabulary and consensus must be achieved to enforce validity to a legal convention in the protection of the rights of older people.

As population ageing progresses across the world and most evident into less developed countries, a common definition is essential, as existing complexities will be heightened and violations of rights at family, community, and institutional levels become convoluted by political and religious pressures – further marginalizing older adults and promoting the perception of burden versus capacity.

- Age discrimination and violations of rights are likely to increase across less-developed nations, where discrimination and gender inequality are still pronounced. Equally there is an invisibility related to age discrimination in developed countries that often goes unnoticed.

Access to economic opportunity, the right to social security, and the right to the highest attainable standard of healthcare for the ageing population will prove to be the greatest policy intervention to mitigate the costs of population ageing in those regions. The recognition at

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private, familial, institutional, and ultimately the national level, of the importance of equality is a central component of a human rights instrument.

- Older women and men experience ageing, and subsequently discrimination, in different circumstances and at various magnitudes. As a result, a Convention must highlight the rights of older women as a distinct group, as discrimination based on gender, followed by amplified vulnerabilities as one ages threatens the livelihood of women as they grow older.

Women play a critical role in society and yet, women all around the world continue to be at the center of the discrimination discussion. Moreover, women will overwhelmingly constitute a majority of the aged population worldwide and the toll of discrimination will become more prominent as the long-term effects of gender inequality, low economic productivity, loss in status, and traditional and religious beliefs accumulate. This will be specifically applicable to the regions of the Middle East, Northern Africa, and Eastern Europe.

- Ageing in the 21st century is an opportunity to encourage a paradigm shift from older people being a burden, to older people as rights holders and contributors to society. To build a strong and prosperous nation, governments must recognize the significant impact of the ageing population.

An international convention and consensus of how government and civil society conducts itself, regardless of the current developmental status of any given country is necessary. A government that empowers and facilitates equal access to employment and healthcare, a society that is inclusive, and the building of a stable financial infrastructure in response to an ageing population will be a critical element of ensuring the successful adoption of an international convention on the rights of older people.

National and International Supervisory Mechanisms

IFA strongly believes we must build on, and adapt from, existing methodologies and approaches. The following are examples of existing mechanisms that could be considered:

- Impose similar structures used to evaluate the progress of the Millennium Development Goals and the enforcement of CEDAW, a panel of experts will review country programs and policies to understand and document goals achieved, lessons learned, and how to improve. If a member state fails to submit a report to be reviewed and/or is unable to effectively and appropriately meet the standards outlined within the human rights instrument, recommendations will be provided.
- Guidance and support on how ageing could be mainstreamed within national policies, programs, and legislation must be provided to national authorities in government, advocacy groups, and ageing related organizations to build momentum to address every dimension of older people and their needs.
- Engage The Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (The Alliance) as a hub and advocacy center. The Alliance is a platform created from the need to strengthen the rights and voice of older people globally. With its mission to ensure voices are heard by UN members states nationally, regionally, through UN Institutions, UN Commissions and the UN General Assembly, The Alliance is committed to work towards more effective instruments to protect the rights of older people.

Specific human rights to be included in the Convention on the Rights of Older Persons

- The right to dignity and respect
- The right to access services
- The right to equity
- The right to self-determination and acknowledgement
- The right to accessible information
- The right to accessible and affordable health and age care
- The right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing
- The right to work and to be treated fairly at work
- The right to freedom from violence and abuse
- The right to equality before the law
- The right to participation in policy-making, political and civil society.

The International Federation on Ageing supports the development of a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. Shifting the focus away from the consequences, to leveraging the economic and social values of older people through the elimination of discrimination is vital to the wealth of any country.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Jane Barratt
Secretary General,
International Federation on Ageing