

13TH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (CRPD)

ASSESSING THE RIGHTS AND NEEDS OF OLDER PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES: AGEING AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

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I am 71 years old and ageing with disability, having suffered a bout of polio at 8 months of age.

I have faced stigma, discrimination and many challenges since childhood in the community, school, and place of work and in the society. As a child I was rehabilitated at home by my mother and also carried on her back to and from school for 4 kilometers. Then as a job-seeker with physical challenges; Later on at work as a woman with disability, and now as a retired aged woman with disability, and thus facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

From my experience, the challenges increase, become harder and worse with advancing age. For example at 55 years of age, my limbs became weaker to a point that I could no longer use my crutches and a caliper and thus got confined to a wheelchair. With reduced mobility, I am no longer able to use public transport in my country and the transport for hire is costly especially for the persons ageing with disabilities without adequate social protection. However it is worth noting that whichever form of transport, the older persons with disabilities are disadvantaged and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic because they need help all the way. Thus, they are unable to observe the physical distancing rule and so exposed to infection just as those in care institutions.

With the dwindling strength, I was unable to continue living alone and doing my domestic chores and so I have to live in with a helper. Consequently, my independence was adversely affected and I can no longer make independent decisions because I need somebody to assist me somehow. In this situation also, I am not able to observe the physical distancing rule. I was also unable to continue managing my small businesses, which has led to reduced finances and dependence on others to cater for my medical bills and also pay for my care-giver.

In addition, I now need to use more assistive devices such as a shower seat and a sliding board among others, which often are not accessible and affordable. Usually in my voluntary community work I am presented with cases of older persons who have suddenly lost their mobility and so in urgent need for assistive devices and especially wheelchairs. Unfortunately such ones do not qualify for the 'Assistive Devices assistance' from the National Disability Council without prior registration as a person with disability.

More often than not, age is accompanied with non-communicable diseases which the older persons and especially those ageing with disabilities cannot cater for unless they are adequately covered medically. For example, although my mother was in the Social Protection Program, it was very costly for the family to cater for the treatment and management of cancer.

The worst hit by the COVID-19 pandemic are the older persons and especially those ageing with disabilities, who are not only prone to the infections leading to death mainly due to their underlying health conditions, but also suffering from unmet health and care, increased isolation, discrimination and stigma. In the less developed countries, basic need such as food is of great concern.

There is need to create communities that can provide care to the vulnerable and in which all can thrive in equity during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Such communities should have:

- Accessible health and health care services
- Accessible transport and communication
- Accessible and affordable houses for all ages
- Friendly environment
- Quality support services

The older persons and especially those with disabilities world over have continued to be subjected to home- confinement and care institutions and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly due to ageism and stereotypes propagated against

them. A practice which contravenes Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; stipulating the *Rights for all persons with disabilities to live independently and being included in the community*; and which does not discriminate on the age limit.

Even as the governments make policies to address the world rapid population ageing, it is imperative to include the older persons with disabilities and ensure their participation in all levels and stages of decision-making in the COVID-19 response and beyond.

There is need for the governments world over to urgently advance the protection and promotion of Human Rights for older people and with focus on those ageing with disabilities because they are more vulnerable than their counterparts.

The fact is that we are all in the process of ageing and the big question for each one of us is whether you can age and live independently with dignity in your community and especially if you age with a disability and worse still with dementia.