

## **NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING, VIENNA**

### **20 years of Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) and 20 years of UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS): Experiences, Achievements and the Way Forward**

**12 November 2020**

#### **MIPAA AND WHAT ELSE FOR OLDER PERSONS?**

**Presentation by Frances Zainoeddin**

**Vice-Chair, NGO Committee on Ageing, New York**

I want to say at the outset that I am speaking as an advocate for the rights of older persons, and I will appear frustrated, critical and impatient with the slow pace of change. I also want to say up front that I am one of the lucky ones. I have a pension, I have good health, I have a place to live and enough food to eat. Let us remember that we are all 18 years older since the adoption of MIPAA and 10 years older since the first meeting of the OEWGA.

MIPAA provides all the ingredients for robust programmes and activities to improve the lives of older persons. Regrettably, it is as relevant today as it was back in 2002. I say regrettably because MIPAA is almost 20 years old and we are still urging action on the same issues for advancing its implementation, as presented in the modalities document for the fourth review and appraisal: long-term care, future of work, older persons in emergency situations, older women, social protection systems, life-long learning opportunities, access to information and communications technology, health policies, NCDs, inclusion of civil society. Are they really *emerging* issues or are they ongoing, neglected, under-financed issues still requiring attention?

Has MIPAA been able to ensure social protection floors? Has elder abuse been obliterated? Are older persons receiving adequate palliative care? Have the conditions of informal care workers improved? How much legislation has been passed to protect the rights of older persons? Have benchmarks been established to provide evidence of a change that has taken place?

UNECE publications on ageing, thank you Vitalija and your staff, show that ECE members have made strides in improving the lives of older persons, but much remains to be done. One policy brief recently published by UNECE drew attention to gender gaps in employment, care, pay, earnings and pensions, that illustrate the accumulation of disadvantages for women over the life-course. The intersectionality of inequalities must be addressed.

The continuing neglect of the dignity of life, and of death, and the inadequacy of services for older persons are unacceptable, after all these years of commitment by Governments. Governments must take a life-course approach when formulating policies and programmes. MIPAA was the instrument that aimed to rebalance the unevenness, the inequalities, the discrepancies in economic and social policies.

Are we to surmise that until and unless older persons are officially viewed by governments as valuable contributors to their families, their communities, to society and to the economy, they will continue to be considered not worth the cost of upkeep?

\* \* \* \* \*

From the point of view of NGOs in our advocacy work for older persons in many other venues, MIPAA is a resource for recommendations on policy-making and action programmes. MIPAA must be linked to other key international instruments.

### 1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The Stakeholder Group on Ageing, comprising NGO members from around the world, was established during the negotiations on the SDGs and we fought to have inclusion of references such as “all ages”, “for all”, “life-long” scattered throughout the text. We managed to get three specific references to “older persons”, one in SDG 2 to end hunger, when it refers to malnutrition, and two references in SDG 11 on urbanization concerning transport and accessible green and public spaces. Each year since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, the Stakeholder Group submits a position paper to the High Level Political Forum. We have representatives who speak on panels and we prepare statements to ensure that older persons remain visible and included in implementation of the SDGs.

The SDGs have provided us with the opportunity to stress the inclusion of older persons in efforts to leave no one behind, and to link the goals and targets with implementation of MIPAA.

### 2. Other intergovernmental bodies

MIPAA is a resource for us to advocate for older persons at other intergovernmental bodies – the ECOSOC functional commissions, (CSOCD, CSW and the Beijing Programme of Action, CPD, Statistics), WHA, HRC, ILO Executive Council), regional commissions as well as other intergovernmental deliberations, such as Financing for Development, the Sendai Framework. At the global level we have the NGO Committees on Ageing in Geneva, New York and Vienna monitoring and participating in intergovernmental deliberations and actions, including providing necessary language in key documents. We also convene and attend events to highlight the continuing injustices suffered by older persons and to plead for attention to be given to their inclusion.

### 3. CIVIC space

MIPAA calls for stronger partnerships with civil society, but all over the world we have witnessed the shrinking of civic space. Governments have constantly stressed that they cannot do it alone, and yet the official inclusion of civil society in planning and decision-making processes is rare. Governments must recognize that we are not only watchdogs, we are also implementers and partners.

### 4. Open-end Working Group on Ageing

I would like to say a few words about the Open-Ended Working Group. The many issues raised in MIPAA have been addressed by the Open-ended Working Group, which has become a place for gerontological discussion and enlightenment. It has yet to deliver on its mandate. We can be sure that no Member State is against human rights of older persons, but there is resistance to having an international legal instrument that would codify their specific rights, wherever they live and under whatever economic and social circumstances; an instrument that would establish legal standards and hold Governments accountable.

How many more gaps in current human rights treaties need to be found to convince Member States that a convention to protect the rights of older persons is necessary? How much more data do we have to collect before action is considered possible? Data will continue to be collected, expanded, refined and improved, but we already have enough collected to know that older persons remain invisible, excluded, treated like second-class citizens, neglected, abused, ostracized, abandoned.

After the adoption and ratification of CRPD – persons with disabilities were looked at in an entirely different way. There was a new understanding of what disability means – an issue of human rights rather than being merely an issue of medical rehabilitation and social welfare.

Older persons also need a convention to change the way they are looked at. There needs to be a better acknowledgement and understanding of what living longer means. Older persons must be seen as rights holders. Ageism has become so pernicious that the WHO has established an international campaign to combat it. What does that say about the current attitudes toward older persons?

If children are treated in the same way as some older persons are treated, there would be a huge outcry. The only conclusion one can draw is that older persons are considered of less value and are therefore disposable. Past their prime, a drain on society, of no economic value, an unnecessary expense.

#### **Are we moving forward?**

I would say yes, but at a snail's pace. At the slow pace we are moving, by the time the youth of today reach 65, they will have to continue our current fight for a dignified life. We do not want

cosmetic treatment, we need major surgery. And major surgery means having a convention that would drastically remove the cancers of existing inequalities, remove existing violations of human rights, remove existing deficits in legislation, policies and programmes, remove existing ageism and elder abuse, remove existing acceptance of the disposability of older persons. They should all be removed, immediately.

That is how we will move forward.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not making it easier to move things forward.

BUT, as Margaret Gillis of ILC-Canada said “COVID-19 is a gift wrapped in a nightmare”. Let us unwrap that gift.

\* \* \* \* \*