

Open Ended Working Group on Ageing

Substantive Session for the Working Group on Ageing

At the United Nations Headquarter

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Mr. Chairman of the Substantive Session for the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing

Members of Participating Delegations

Ladies and Gentleman

I am very pleased to participate in the work of the open ended working group on ageing, and I consider my speech as a contribution by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to the current session.

Mr. Chairman,

- We all know that elderly persons constitute an increasing share of world population, and their numbers are expected to reach two billion in coming decades. This fact makes elderly issues, the challenges they will be facing and the difficulties they will be living with a very urgent matter that requires early formulating of an international framework and bases for dealing with it. Development requirements necessitate the participation and integration of all social strata and groups, each according to their abilities and needs in a manner that satisfies the needs of all members of society and observes their interests and rights. This applies to the elderly whose dignity should be maintained.

- Social Protection is a common right. Since the elderly are the most vulnerable group to all sorts of abuse and to negative stereotyping, they are the most in need for social protection. Even in rich societies, many elderly persons live in poverty and are often victims of discrimination. In fact, elderly persons in times of economic crises and economic restructuring are exposed to exclusion. Moreover, most countries face crises and difficulties in implementing their social protection programs, and in supporting their elderly citizens.

Mr. Chairman,

- The International Human Rights Declaration stipulates in Article one that “All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. This equality does not change with age, but it is not defined in international human rights conventions. The elderly are vulnerable to discrimination on the basis of age. This discrimination excludes them and deprives them of enjoying the right to education on equal footing with others, and of realizing their right to health care, and their legal capacity or eligibility.
- The elderly do not form a homogenous group. They are a group not formed on the basis of age alone. They are governed by several factors, such as sex, racial origin, place of residence, incapacity, poverty, economic and social conditions. In general, the elderly suffer from stereotyping and marginalization. However, elderly women are the most vulnerable group to social stereotyping and the least group in terms of social participation and benefitting from available opportunities. They are also the most vulnerable to verbal, sexual and psychological aggression and financial abuse.

Mr. Chairman,

- In reviewing the international framework for human rights we find out that the rights of elderly men and women are not well covered by international conventions on human rights that put State parties under obligations. Moreover, there is a gap within the bodies that monitor the Conventions and commitments concerning collecting reports on the condition of elderly persons. In addition to the lack of a detailed data base on various classifications of elderly persons on the basis of gender, sex, racial origin,

religion, language, and socio-economic condition. Member States rarely include the elderly in their reports.

- Similar to other marginalized groups (women, children and persons with disabilities) there is no binding comprehensive international convention for protecting and enforcing human rights for the elderly. Also, there are no binding supervisory arrangements for the sets of United Nations principles in this sphere. The existence of a binding international convention on the rights of elderly persons would create a binding legal framework that largely defines their rights, identifies the responsibilities of member states, the criteria and steps needed for protecting elderly persons, building a data base on the rights and needs of the elderly, and creating an enabling environment for them.
- Although some rights for the elderly are addressed in international charters and conventions, these rights are not written in clear and specific terms. Even when the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities addresses the rights of elderly persons it addresses them from the perspective of disability rather than age. In this case the basic criteria for that convention is disability rather than age.
- There is a number of urgent matters we believe should be considered legally binding rights to be contained in an international convention that obliges States Parties to take all necessary measures to enforce these rights and enable elderly persons to enjoy them:
 1. The issue of discrimination and inequality on the basis of age obstructs the enjoyment of elderly persons of the right to education and employment opportunities.
 2. Legal eligibility and equality before the law. Some societies often accuse the elderly person of being obscene and deprive him/her of legal eligibility or capacity.
 3. Independent living and a decent standard of living. Most often the elderly is deprived of independent living, although he/she could have arranged for that. Most often they are placed in shelter homes, or in places prepared for them by the State. This deprives the elderly person of the right to choose where he/she lives; the right to choose the persons he/she live with; the right to participate and to be socially integrated.

Mr. Chairman,

The above mentioned binding rights not enjoyed by the elderly constitute a small part of a long list of rights not attained by elderly persons due to marginalization and exclusion. We do not have the time to list these rights now, and it would be fair to leave this task to technical committees to identify these rights and suggest ways of addressing them.

Now is the time to consider initiating a binding international framework for protecting elderly rights. We need a convention on the rights of elderly persons that reflects international standards and inter connections of human rights. The suggested convention should take into account consulting elderly persons, listening to their problems and to solutions they suggest for these problems. In this context, we see the necessity for enhancing and expanding the circle of consultation and participation to include civil society organizations concerned with the elderly. We also wish that international criteria of the suggested convention would observe the necessity of eliminating discrimination against the elderly on the basis of their age, as well as enhancing the principles of equality and respecting the dignity of elderly persons, keeping in mind the international principle which states that all people are equal in their dignity and their rights.

Mr. Chairman,

All this entails enhancing the capacities of elderly persons and raising their awareness of their rights covered by the international framework, and urging them to demand these rights. It also entails enhancing the capacities of responsible officials and other stakeholders to enforce the rights of old elderly persons. The existence of a binding international framework entails the adoption of measures and policies in line with the implementation of the convention and with strengthening the principles of accountability and sovereignty of the law.

In conclusion, I believe that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a good model to be followed in terms of consultations comprehensiveness and participation by elderly persons, in addition to its rapid period in terms of adoption, signing, and ratification by States Parties.

The existence of a convention on the rights of elderly persons will constitute a roadmap for today's youth, and will build the foundations for feelings of being secure and eliminate feelings of worrying about the future.

My Thanks to All of you