



HelpAge International Opening Statement

Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

Second Working Session, 1 – 4 August 2011

Current situation of older people's rights

HelpAge International is a global network of eighty affiliated organisations, over two hundred partners and hundreds of older people's associations. As such, we would like to applaud the Bureau for their inclusion of older women and men on each of the panels at this Second Working Session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing.

We hope that each of these panel discussions will illustrate the day to day realities of older people's lives and the way in which society's response to being old affects the enjoyment of their rights.

Firstly discrimination in old age continues to be tolerated across the world. Ageist attitudes and stereotypes are common at every level: in the family, in the community, in the workplace and more broadly in society. Ageism and age discrimination may manifest themselves differently in different social, economic and cultural contexts but they remain rife, often unrecognised and are still accepted.

Discrimination in old age is rarely based on old age alone. More often it is based on multiple factors, complicated further by the cumulative impact of a lifetime of discrimination.

And as populations age, the number of people facing discrimination in old age will increase.

The right to health has been addressed from the perspective of ageing in a number of treaty body general comments and concluding observations as part of the periodic reporting process.

Despite this, older women and men are still being denied their right to accessible and appropriate healthcare. In a survey across 32 countries, 63 per cent of older people said they found it difficult to access healthcare when they needed it¹.

¹ HelpAge International, *Insights on Ageing: a survey report*, 2010

Check Against Delivery

Health care systems are not being adapted to take into account population ageing. Primary health care services are rarely age-friendly. Older patients continue to be refused treatment by health care workers because they are too old and too poor.

Attitudes to being old also have an impact on the violence and abuse that people are subjected to, yet research on, and responses to, the different forms of elder abuse and, in particular, violence against women over the age of 49, remain woefully inadequate.

The right to social security and other forms of social protection become more important in old age, yet fewer than one in five people over 60 receive a pension. Universal enjoyment of the right to social security in old age is, however, not a distant hope or lofty aspiration. Universal non-contributory pensions provide an affordable and administratively possible way for low- and middle-income countries to meet their obligations to fulfill everyone's right to social security in old age.

And finally, on social exclusion, unless specific measures are taken, we may all become less able to participate in the community around us as we grow older. This can lead to increased exclusion, isolation, loss of independence and autonomy, all of which are major threats to our dignity. The exclusion and lack of participation of older people also has a negative impact on society as a whole.

Discrimination in old age and violation of older people's rights is a universal problem that demands a universal response. Older people's organizations across our network have expressed their strong desire for a new, legally binding instrument on the rights of older people and so we look forward to working with member states on our shared objective of identifying ways to improve the protection of older people's rights.

Thank you.

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