



21 August 2012

Open-ended Working Group on Ageing
Third working session, 21-24 August 2012, New York, UN Headquarters
Statement of the International Council on Social Welfare

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

My name is Sergei Zelenev, I am Executive Director of the International Council on Social Welfare. The ICSW is a non-governmental international organization devoted to promoting social welfare, social development and social justice worldwide. ICSW activities are conducted at the national level by national umbrella organizations, which are indigenous to each country. The present ICSW statement provides an opportunity for our member organizations to present our collective views regarding some important issues pertinent to the agenda of this session.

We at ICSW consider the establishment of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing by the General Assembly through its resolution 65/85 as an important step in the quest for the protection and promotion of human rights of older persons.

For the ICSW that objective is not something abstract; rather, it is very down-to-earth and has enormous practical significance for our activities at the local level. The results of the first review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing have demonstrated that wide-spread age discrimination, neglect and violence against older women and men, as well as the absence of meaningful social protection, have remained an unfortunate reality in many countries, rich and poor alike, but particularly so in low-income developing countries. The mainstreaming of older persons' concerns in policies and programmes at the national level remains generally the exception rather than the rule. It is not a secret that knowledge of the Madrid Plan at the national level is often quite minimal, and many commitments of the Madrid Plan have remained only on paper. The fact that the Madrid Plan is not a binding international document does not help its implementation either. It is obvious that we need a more powerful, dedicated international instrument to trigger decisive national action to improve the treatment of older persons in many societies.

In that light the ICSW supports the elaboration of the Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, as well as other measures such as establishing a new position of a Special Rapporteur to study and report on the situation of older persons.

The past sessions of the Open-ended Working Group, bringing together experts and partners from around the world, have become an important international forum on matters pertinent to the human rights of older persons, particularly for identifying normative and implementation gaps and suggesting forward-looking solutions. That is why the ICSW voices its support for the renewal of the mandate of the Open-ended Working Group and the continuation of its work. The ICSW sees this important work as part of the ongoing international social dialogue on ageing, which is essential in our rapidly ageing world.

In supporting the work of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing, the ICSW also wishes to draw attention to the need to continue the refinement of its methods of work in order to make it more effective and efficient, thus facilitating a qualitative leap forward and helping to achieve a “critical mass” of support when the adoption of new instruments aimed at the protection of human rights of older persons comes within reach. In our view, this task is non-trivial and, given its significance, it deserves attention of government representatives and civil society organizations as well as the UN Secretariat. We need a bold step forward towards a new instrument.

With respect to strengthening social protection for older persons, which is one pivotal element of their human rights, the international community took an important step forward this summer. The social protection of older persons—which should be sustainable and adapted to national circumstances – remains one of the key objectives on the ICSW agenda aimed at reducing poverty and social exclusion. Recommendation No. 202 of the International Labour Conference concerning “national floors of social protection” - adopted unanimously in mid-June 2012 by all ILO member states and social partner organizations - provides an important normative base aimed at achieving guarantees of basic income security for older persons, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, helping to promote and protect their human rights. The work of the Open-ended Working Group should build on that momentum of global consensus and move the situation of older people forward in the form of a more encompassing instrument.

In conclusion, I would like, on behalf of our members, to express sincere gratitude for this opportunity to address this distinguished Open-ended Working Group on Ageing. All our member institutions are ready to support your work.

Thank you.