



*Age and Youth in Action*

Statement of Gray Panthers at the Open Ended Working Group on  
Ageing at the United Nations – August 12, 2013

*“There is still so much to be done.”*

*Maggie Kuhn – Founder of Gray Panthers*

Ageism continues to permeate both policy and practice throughout the world. The problem typically manifests in three connected elements - prejudicial attitudes towards older people, old age, and the aging process; discriminatory practices against older people; and institutional practices and policies that perpetuate negative stereotypes about older people. The Open Ended Working Group on Ageing has demonstrated that ageism does exist in the form of human rights infractions against older persons throughout the world. The OEWG has also shown that the enormous gaps and omissions in current human rights instruments do not effectively protect the fastest growing segment of the world's population – older persons.

When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in December 1948, who would have thought that women, children and disabled persons needed specific protection of their rights? When it was noted that their unique situations require tailored solutions, governments created specific conventions to ensure mandatory and transparent action to avoid discrimination and lack of attention. Older persons, likewise, because of their increasing numbers, are voicing their concerns about being marginalized and neglected.

In 1948, the worldwide number of persons over the age of 60 represented a very small percentage of the globe's population. In fact, the entire estimated world population was approximately 2.5 billion persons. Yet, in 2011, the global population of those 60 + was estimated to be 809 million persons. Modern demographic projections suggest that there will be more than 2 billion older persons by 2050.

*Crossroads*

Gray Panthers endorses a comprehensive, integrated, enforceable, well-drafted Convention to Protect the Human Rights of Older Persons.

An increasing number of governments realize that older persons are no longer a small minority group left to their own devices or to the care of family members. They represent a vital sector of the national and global economy, entitled to protections as enjoyed by other groups. A convention to acknowledge the specific situation of older persons, their continuing contribution to society as well as their vulnerabilities, is essential for ensuring a future for all segments of society that is fair, economically

sustaining and inclusive. The protection of the rights of older persons cannot be left to the whims of those in power. It must be mandatory. Governments need to be held accountable for protecting all citizens.

Gray Panthers is dedicated to the identification, reduction and elimination of ageism in all of its forms. Certainly, the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing has identified previously hidden components of ageist policies and activities throughout the globe. Traditionally invisible to policy makers, societies and individuals, an integrated human rights instrument with appropriate enforceability mechanisms can create positive change and address such issues as –

- Health care delivery,
- Productive ageing,
- Employment in both the formal and informal sectors, including addressing the issue of mandatory retirement and exclusion from productive economic activities
- Misinformed attitudes of the benefits of ageing, in policy, attitude and practice,
- Freedom from maltreatment, violence and elder abuse,
- Ensuring financial and familial stability,
- Vulnerability of older persons in emergency situations,
- Long term care,
- Increasing levels of non communicable diseases,
- Full inclusion in civic, cultural and political affairs.

### *The Global Opportunity*

It's hard for us, at Gray Panthers, to understand resistance to a comprehensive international instrument with the highest form of enforceability mechanisms to protect the human rights of older persons. The irreversible process of population ageing represents one of mankind's greatest achievements – increased human longevity in good health. It is in the best interest of all nations to help shape the future of population ageing in order to assure an increasingly safe and prosperous world.

The most comprehensive of the existing instruments addressing the unique concerns and issues facing older persons, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, has significant drawbacks. For instance, MIPAA lacks enforceability provisions critical to ensure that the instrument has its intended comprehensive, positive impact.

With that, the Member States of the United Nations have an obligation to ensure that older persons remain productive and healthy, and do not impinge upon issues of sustainable, economic and social development. This can only be accomplished in a comprehensive manner. The piecemeal approach, advocated by some, will not benefit humankind, in the short or long term.



### *Addressing Concerns*

Gray Panthers understands that each one of us is ageing. Once born, every person becomes older daily. The issues of older persons are the issues of every younger person. Intergenerational solidarity is an essential component of our global discussion. A comprehensive human rights instrument to protect older persons with provisions that ensure enforceability benefits every person of every generation.

One of the constant refrains with regard to creating a global human rights instrument is that the process takes time. Undoubtedly, this is true. Yet, we have the sense that those resisting the process use this refrain as an opportunity to slow, or even seek to stop, the process of working toward a comprehensive human rights instrument with enforceability provisions.

On this earth, each of us has limited time. As one reaches older years, this becomes increasingly evident. Gray Panthers hope that we not waste this precious opportunity at the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing process, to seek comprehensive protections in a carefully thought through instrument to protect the world's increasingly aging population.

### *Moving Forward*

We, at Gray Panthers, welcome partnerships with like-minded NGO's and Member States. We offer the opportunity to serve as one of the global coordinators on this critical global issue.

We encourage Member States, civil society, academia, and the private sector to help us, at Gray Panthers, take concrete steps toward a Convention on this critical global issue. Continuing a dialogue with those who may not yet understand the benefits of a comprehensive human rights instrument is essential.

Notable progress has been made. Proudly, Latin America has been leading the charge. Now, acknowledging that a global Convention is the most effective human rights protection for older persons, the ministers of the African Union endorsed a Convention in its November 2012 "Common Position on Human Rights of Older Persons in Africa". Moreover, many Asian nations are also on board. The concerns of Europe, the United States and Canada can be effectively addressed.

Join with us. Let us create an effective Convention to protect the human rights of older persons.

*"There is still so much to be done."*     *Maggie Kuhn*

