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# POSITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS OF OLDER PEOPLE

## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GERONTOLOGY AND GERIATRICS

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The Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” This equality does not change with age. Human rights are the rights people are entitled to simply because they are human beings.

In reality, however, the human rights of older people are not secured sufficiently and too many of them are suffering from poverty, illness, deprivation, isolation, neglect, even violence and abuse. This situation is derived from the vulnerable status of older people in the society.

The general human rights enshrined in existing UN instruments are not sufficient for protection against the unique forms of vulnerability. Particularly in developing countries, these standards are quite low, remaining inadequate for the effective protection of older people.

In the light of this situation we IAGG would like to reiterate our support for the establishment of a new UN convention on human rights of older people as well as such measures as the establishment of a special rapporteur to study and report on the situation of older persons.

In encouraging the new international legal instrument we have to pay attention to the differences of the human rights issues in each country according to the

developmental stage.

While I have worked as a university professor of social welfare and a minister of health and welfare of the Republic of Korea I have experienced changing issues of human rights of older people over half a century in its development process. Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world as least developed country (LDC) 50 years ago. It has achieved tremendous development for the past five decades, and thus entered the level of advanced developing country.

In this process of development the issues of human rights of older people has changed. At the early stage of development it was urgent for us to meet the basic needs caused by poverty and illness. We focused on the rights to food, clothing, housing and medical care for older persons.

During the development process Korea has developed universal health care and income security programs including public assistance for needy people, which in turn have led to improving these human basic needs to solve human rights issues.

In these days after the rapid development of social protection for the last five decades, however, Korea has been facing new issues of human rights of older people, like loneliness, status down-grading, isolation, neglect, age discrimination, violence, and abuse and so on. Korean society has experienced changes in human rights from the rights to have basic needs met to the rights to have a decent living.

Here we need to think about the relationship of development and human rights

of older people. By my observation on the relationship of development to human rights in Korea, I could draw the following conclusions:

First, development is a necessary condition to ensure the human rights of older people. It includes the development of social security, health care system, and the like.

Second, development is not a sufficient condition to ensure human rights of older people. It has been followed by new issues of human rights of older people.

Third, therefore, we need a more comprehensive international legal instrument addressing the fundamental rights of older people world-wide regardless of the developmental stage.

Considering that the mission of IAGG is to promote the highest level of achievements in gerontological research and training world-wide, I would like to offer IAGG's help in collecting data on the situation of older people and human rights issues in each country. This should help establish an international legal instrument addressing the fundamental rights of older people world-wide.