

Closing Statement

Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing

August 15, 2013

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, representatives of civil society,

We have had three days of interesting and thoughtful discussion on the existing international framework on the human rights of older persons. It is incontrovertible that, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares in the first Article, "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." This is true throughout life – every older person holds the same human rights as everyone else. Nevertheless, the sad fact remains that not all older persons are treated with dignity and respect for their rights; their needs and interests are too often ignored by their societies, their communities, their families and sometimes, their governments.

The question remains: what can the international community, and more specifically the member states of the United Nations, do to help improve the situations of older persons?

Some have said, during the last few days, that current international human rights law is insufficient for providing protection for older persons. They argue that only a specific instrument that focuses on older persons and their distinctive needs will serve to protect their rights. However, most speakers over the past days have acknowledged that universal human rights apply to older persons, but note that they are not systematically or adequately adhered to. The problem, then, is one of implementation. Ways to promote and protect the rights of older persons, and create accountability for violations and abuses of those rights, have been discussed and should be the topic for further exploration.

It is clear that older persons in many countries face neglect, challenges, and even abuse. What is not yet clear, however, is the best way to address the difficulties and inequalities older persons face. Whether a new convention on the rights of older persons would be the most effective way to close the implementation gap is still in question. We will continue to examine the analyses of the Open-Ended Working Group, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the reports of the Secretary-General to the Commission on Social Development and the Third Committee, and input from civil society.

In the meantime, governments need to implement their existing human rights obligations. They also need to take into consideration the Madrid International Plan of Action and other guidelines and implement policies to the benefit of their older persons.

Turning briefly to the OAS draft Convention that has been mentioned repeatedly in this forum, we would like to point out that the United States appended a footnote to the OAS

resolution concerning the negotiation of the draft Convention, noting that the U.S. does not endorse the text of the draft Inter-American Convention.

Mr. Chairman,

The contributions older persons can and do make to their communities are a benefit to us all. This should be recognized by their families and communities, but sometimes is not. The process of ageing is often difficult and lonely. The rights of older persons need to be protected and promoted. Much more can be done, and should be done now. While we deliberate over the best way forward, the lack of a Convention should not be an excuse for the lack of protection for the rights and interests of older persons.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.