

HelpAge International Opening Statement

7th Session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

UN Headquarters, New York, 12th December 2016

HelpAge International looks forward to a successful and constructive seventh session of the Working Group.

We believe that there has been a significant political shift since this Working Group last met in July 2015.

We have seen a groundswell of advocacy by older people calling for a convention and an increase in the engagement of national human rights institutions also in support of a new convention.

We welcomed the positive response by Member States to the Independent Expert's report at the Human Rights Council in September. This included the statement by the Geneva Group of Friends, namely Argentina, Austria, Brazil, El Salvador, Namibia, Portugal, Montenegro, Singapore, Tunisia, Slovenia, and Uruguay, which called on the international community to work towards achieving sufficient international standards on the rights of older persons. We welcomed the support for a new convention expressed by a number of African Member States: Benin, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Namibia, and South Africa and the recognition by the European Union that MIPAA is not a human rights instrument and therefore they will engage in an open discussion on the best way to strengthen protection of the rights of older persons.

We have also been encouraged by the opening up of political space by Member States wishing to discuss the parameters of a new convention and what its content might look like away from the polarised politics that has constrained discussion here at the Working Group.

Check Against Delivery

This includes the meeting in Slovenia, the two meetings in Seoul under the auspices of ASEM, the Asia Europe Meeting, and meetings at the national level between government, civil society, older people's groups and national human rights institutions, for example in Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Denmark, the UK, Germany and Kenya to name a few.

Mr Chair, what these inter-sessional developments demonstrate is that the political space for a substantive discussion on human rights in older age and the contents of a new convention has opened up. The polarisation of political views for and against a convention along regional lines no longer reflects the political reality nor what Member States, older people, civil society and national human rights institutions want to discuss.

For this 7th session of the Working Group to be successful, we must recognise and reflect this political shift and move on from such a polarised debate. This session provides the opportunity to have this more substantive discussion, a discussion which is essential to build consensus and ensure the Working Group fulfils its mandate in its entirety.