

## **Open-ended Working Group on Ageing Seventh Session**

### **OHCHR intervention at the panel discussion on the 2030 Agenda**

First of all, let me say that we see tremendous opportunities in the 2030 Agenda for the advancement of all human rights.

The Agenda is **strongly grounded in human rights**, and addresses both **economic and social rights** and civil and social rights – as well as the right to development – reflecting the indivisibility of all human rights – and thus offers **comprehensive and integrated vision** of sustainable development.

It is a **universal agenda**, applicable for all people everywhere, just as human rights.

It is **people-centered, with the focus on ‘leaving no one behind** and reaching the furthest first’ – strongly grounded in equality and non-discrimination principle of human rights.

It calls for **greater global policy coherence** and integrated responses by Member States and the UN system – and **more robust accountability and dynamic partnership with all stakeholders**.

And the Agenda states clearly that its implementation must be in accordance with the **obligations of States under international law**.

The Agenda specifically recognizes the older persons as among the **groups that must be empowered**, along with children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants.

Older persons are also specifically included in a few of the SDG targets:

- Under Goal 2 on hunger, target 2.2 to end all forms of malnutrition and address the needs of older persons;
- Under Goal 11 on cities and human settlements, target 11.2 to provide access to safe transport with special attention to the needs of older persons; and
- Target 11.7 to provide universal access to safe public spaces, in particular for older persons

While these are welcome, one can immediately see that, these are very, very limited set of targets and that they do not capture a whole range of issues concerning the older persons.

However the good news is that, at the heart of the 2030 Agenda is its commitment to **“leaving no one behind”**. This is essentially an agenda to combat inequalities, discrimination and exclusion.

And it is a message that reminds us that sustainable development means putting people first, including older persons. That progress for the few is not progress at all.

‘Leaving no one behind’ compels us to focus on discrimination, and the goal of equality, rather than just vulnerability.

The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals identify many **concrete measures** that will contribute to reversing inequalities, if the Agenda is fully implemented.

For example, at the national level, the new Agenda commits to eliminating discrimination in laws, policies and practice and addressing social, economic, environmental, political and cultural inequalities.

This includes a number of measures relevant to **human rights of older persons** such as: implementing universal social protection floors; promoting equal rights to economic resources, access to health, education, water and sanitation, and so on.

The question, then, is on **how**. How can we ensure that the Agenda is implemented in a way that promotes the rights of older persons? How make sure that they are not only "left behind" but become active agents of sustainable development?

I put before you four considerations, from our experience of advocating and mainstreaming human rights-based approach in the Agenda 2030:

**First, the alignment with international standards.** If the Agenda is to be implemented in accordance with international law, we need to have the international standards to measure the progress and hold States accountable. And here is the challenge. We know that there is currently a gap in the body of international human rights law that specifically speak to the rights of older persons. Having that international standards would be of critical importance in advancing the implementation and accountability.

**Second, the focus on equality and non-discrimination principles.** As said earlier, goals and targets related to the older persons are rather random at best. The equality focus gives a great entry point and for this, **disaggregation of data** by age, gender and other groups becomes critically important. Within the UN system, OHCHR and UN WOMEN have been leading the UN system-wide efforts to develop **“Shared Framework for Action on Combatting Inequalities and Discrimination”**.

The purpose of this “Shared Framework for Action” is to establish a common understanding within the United Nations system of the challenges of rising

inequalities and pervasive discrimination, to identify the separate and joint actions needed to combat it, and to promote the systematic integration of equality and non-discrimination issues in United Nations support to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. This framework should also help to **mainstream the rights of older persons in UN support at country level.**

**Third**, the **participation** of older persons as rights-holders and active agents of development. This is an important human rights principle -- all rights-holders, in particular the most marginalized and disadvantaged, should be guaranteed the means to participate in decisions that affect the enjoyment of their rights. At the collective level, civil society organisations constituted by persons who organize themselves formally and informally around common interests should also participate in policy-making, implementation and evaluation.

As the 2030 Agenda is also an agenda for **partnership**, we also need to look closely at the roles and responsibilities of private sector and the public-private sector partnerships that provide services to the older persons. States have an obligation to protect human rights and ensure that businesses and private sector act in accordance with international human rights, labour and environmental standards. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights offer key normative and operational guidelines in this regard, and should be the basis for ensuring that SDG implementation partnerships are accountable, including in the context of the older persons.

**My last point is on accountability.** This was one of the weaknesses of the previous MDGs agenda, which the SDG framework is trying to address through “robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review framework”. It is to be noted, however, that to date, the international accountability is limited to **voluntary national review**, which, by its 'voluntary' nature, does not necessarily entail specific reporting on older persons. As such, it does not constitute a mandatory human rights review mechanism.

From our part, we are supporting efforts to strengthen the accountability framework at all levels, by actively promoting **links with relevant accountability mechanisms for human rights** and other international norms and standards. Country and thematic reviews should systematically draw upon information and recommendations from the UN human rights mechanisms.

A welcome development has been that at the first review under the High-level Political Forum, at the request of the ECOSOC President, HR Council provided its contributions on its work with specific focus on equality and non-discrimination, as the theme of the HLPF this year was on "leaving no one behind". The Council is invited to submit its contribution to the HLPF next year, and hopefully this will become a regular feature. To fully capitalize this opportunity, we need to further mainstream the rights of older persons in the work of the Council, UPR, Special Procedures and treaty bodies.

At country level, **national human rights institutions** are uniquely placed to play a bridging role between stakeholders and promote transparent, participatory and inclusive national processes of implementation and monitoring. The landmark decision of the Working Group at this session will no doubt pave the road towards further strengthening the role of national human rights institutions in monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and ensuring the inclusion of older persons.

In concluding, I would like to recall that the Madrid International Plan of Action called for mainstreaming of ageing and older persons into the development agenda. To do so effectively, it would greatly help to have a common understanding, approach and standards on the human rights of older persons. The work of this Working Group, and that of the Independent Expert, is critical to that end.