

**SECOND SESSION OF THE OPEN ENDED WORKING GROUP
ON STRENGTHENING THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS OF
OLDER PERSONS**

**STATEMENT MADE BY
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AUGUST 4, 2011

Madam Co facilitator,

Thank you very much for giving me the floor. I want to thank you and all the panelists for their presentations.

Mr. Chairman,

I have a written speech prepared by my colleague, but I thought let me try and address some of the issues which are of critical importance.

I come from a country which, of course, has the second largest population in the world and the second largest population of older people in the world.

We are also a country, which is grappling with a growing population of older people and the need to find ways and means to address issues of people who are living longer in our society, in our economy, in our systems, both governmentally as well as the non-governmentally.

People living longer are a good development, and they should be able to enjoy the benefits of developments, globalization, etc.

India has seen in the last 10 to 15 years, high level of economic development. We have done fairly well in the field of medical sciences with a fairly high rise in the life expectancy.

But we have also seen, along with this, rapid urbanization in our country and increasing number of shifts from rural areas to urban areas. In fact, when one was growing up, it was a sort of axiomatic thing to say that 70% of India lived in rural areas. Today the figure, if we include urban conglomerations also, the urban population is nearly half of the population.

Rapid urbanization, globalization, improvement in health systems, all have resulted improvement in life expectancy but have certainly brought forward newer challenges. These are the challenges of security, health care, need for care and maintenance.

Addressing them is critical to ensure that older persons are able to lead a life of dignity and productivity.

Traditional norms and values of the Indian society laid stress on showing respect and providing care for the older persons. However, in recent times, society has witnessed a gradual but definite withering of joint family systems and such societal institutions especially in urban areas, where we talk of nuclear families and so on.

As a result of which, a large number of parents face the prospect of their families not really being in a position to care of them. This has also exposed them to lack of emotional, physical and financial support.

In India, we are also certainly coming to the realization that a productive life span i.e., up to 60 years of age is perhaps too early as one lives several years thereafter and has to provide for that. This may not be necessarily easy to cater to, in what have been the norms of society and of the economy in terms of paying employees and others.

We also have to reckon with the fact that people are living longer in rural areas and there is feminization of older persons as women live longer than men.

Our national effort has been to improve the quality of life of the older persons by providing basic amenities like shelter, food, medical care and entertainment opportunities. This has been done in a holistic manner by adopting multi-stakeholder approaches of involving not just governmental agencies but also the civil society.

I am very glad that we have a number of NGOs from India here, who are contributing valuably to the debate that we are having here.

Madam Co facilitator, Mr Chairman,

There is a reference to the old age and need to provide opportunities and address their needs, in our Constitution. We also developed in 1999, a National

Policy on Older Persons. We are currently reviewing this policy to make it comprehensive.

The National Policy reaffirms the commitment to ensure the well being of older persons. The policy envisages State support to ensure financial and food security, health care, shelter and other needs of older persons to improve the quality of their life.

Of course, like most of the countries in the world, we also have instituted systems of giving preferences to older persons. There are special exemptions for them in the Income Tax Act. Special reservation facilities have also been made for older persons in the railways and air travel, etc.

There are a number of programmatic schemes which have been undertaken by the Government of India. In particular, we have undertaken legislative action which is the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007. This act, in fact, provides the legal basis to ensure need based maintenance for parents and senior citizens and their welfare.

All this I am stating, basically, to say that there is awareness about the issue of older persons within government, within society, and certainly in large parts of the world.

I am, therefore, extremely appreciate of the work that you are doing here in this particular group. I would like to say that the discussion that has happened in the direction of whether we should have a Convention on the rights of older persons is something which has thrown up variety of views.

This is certainly important as we progress forward and think about it, and then try and come to a particular conclusion in which the global community can come together.

In our understanding, the most important thing is that we must strengthen our efforts in ensuring that older persons are able to live a life of dignity in the society.

I thank you very much Madam co-facilitator and Mr Chairman.
