

**Open-ended Working Group on Ageing  
Tenth session, 15-18 April 2019**

**Video message by the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights**

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Friends and colleagues,

At the outset, let me warmly welcome the progress you have made over the last few years under this Open-ended Working Group, in identifying concrete, substantive elements, where the protection of human rights of older persons need to be further strengthened.

I would like to commend the leadership of the Chair, Ambassador García Moritan of Argentina, and the efforts by all stakeholders to move forward this discussion, which is vital for this significant and growing population in our society. I particularly appreciate the efforts by civil society organizations and national human rights institutions, in bringing the voices of older persons to this process.

Thanks to progress in health, people today are living longer, remain active longer, enjoy and contribute to society longer. By 2050, many of us might be living up to 100 years of age.

Yet today, we know that there are significant protection gaps concerning older persons.

One in 10 older persons faces abuse every month.

Older persons are barred from seeking jobs to which they qualify. Ageism is rampant in our daily life – at work, on media and in our attitudes.

With their life-long skills and experience, older persons have the potential to make significant contributions to our society and economy, individually and through families and communities. Education, life-long learning and capacity building, play a critical role in enabling older persons to continue to contribute to our society.

Social protection is a fundamental human right.

The capacity of older persons to enjoy their human rights is endangered without an adequate social pension. Older women are especially at risk, as they tend to live longer than men do. Fewer women than men participate in the formal sector and the

unpaid care work they perform throughout their lifetime can impede their ability to access formal employment, receive decent wages and contribute to their social security.

Social and economic policies need to correct this imbalance by promoting equality between women and men. Childcare, for example, should be guaranteed as a social protection measure and social pensions ensure an adequate standard of living.

Social security is not a privilege limited to rich countries. Research by ILO shows that even the poorest countries could afford a universal social protection system.

Human rights should be at the heart of universal social protection systems and inform them in their content, process and outcome.

We need universal social protection systems that ensure a participatory process in their preparation and respect the right of individuals and organizations to seek, receive and impart information on all social security entitlements in a clear and transparent manner. This will happen only if universal social protection systems are established and implemented according to human rights standards and principles.

Sadly, when it comes to older persons, the current legal and policy framework at both the national and international levels remain grossly inadequate and inconsistent-- a patchwork at best.

There are only a limited number of countries that provide explicit guarantees of equality and non-discrimination on the basis of age.

Existing international human rights instruments are silent on older persons. As a consequence, older persons remain invisible in the recommendations of UN human rights mechanisms. Of more than 13,000 recommendations regarding discrimination adopted by these bodies, less than one per cent concern older persons.

A dedicated convention would have reach and prominence, providing coherence to an otherwise fragmented, uneven and incomplete landscape of legal norms.

It would set much needed international standards related to the human rights of older persons, bringing closer alignment among varying national legal and policy frameworks.

And it would put in place monitoring mechanisms for accountability and redress to ensure the implementation of

measures to protect, respect and fulfil the human rights of older persons.

At the same time, there is much scope to further mainstream human rights of older persons in the work of the United Nations system, in the existing human rights mechanisms and in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Our rights do not change with age.

We must move forward, and make progress in this journey to strengthen the protection of older persons, for the benefit of us all.

I thank you.