A statement on Human Rights Day by the Steering Group of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP)

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This landmark document embodies humanity’s hope and commitment to a set of fundamental rights and freedoms to which all individuals are entitled. Today, we celebrate its achievements as we reaffirm our commitment to the work that lies ahead of us.

UDHR is the pivotal document that established the normative foundation for human rights. It inspired treaties that are legally binding on economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights\(^1\). Its principles contributed to developing a recognized set of human rights norms in regional instruments\(^2\), national constitutions, and laws. It also advanced specialized treaties that address specific human rights issues.

As a result, we witnessed positive strides in promoting and protecting human rights across the globe. The lives of some of the most disadvantaged members of society have been improved, particularly women and children, whose rights are enshrined in specialized United Nations (UN) Conventions. Older persons’ rights are not yet enshrined in a specialized UN convention and are comparatively invisible across the international human rights system.

Despite the awareness raised and policy advancements made with the support of the UN Principles for Older Persons and Madrid International Action Plan on Ageing\(^3\), and notwithstanding the great efforts by some civil society organisations (CSOs), National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), and Members States in working to close the gaps at the UN\(^4\), the current international framework provides fragmented and inconsistent coverage of older persons’ rights in law and practice\(^5\). For example:

- Older persons do not fully enjoy their right to an adequate standard of living with rising poverty\(^6\).
- One in 6 older persons experience a violation of their right to live free from violence as they experience some form of abuse in the community setting\(^7\).
- Conceptual gaps in the right to health and health services exist for older persons as it relates to long-term care, palliative care, and decision-making with cognitive decline or impairment\(^8\).
- Older women continue to experience gendered disadvantage accumulated throughout their life course despite 2010 General Recommendation No. 27 by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women\(^9\).
- In times of war, conflict and other hostilities, the human rights of older persons are disproportionately violated, as reported by international human rights NGOs\(^10\).
Such human rights gaps as well as wide-spread ageism, age discrimination, multiple intersecting forms of discrimination, and the persistent conceptual deficiencies in the current international human rights system require a new legally-binding UN convention to set the standards needed to bring about dignified, secured, and self-determined lives in older age.

We are immensely proud and grateful for all those who have come together to uphold the rights of older persons and campaign for a new UN convention, including younger persons, older persons, CSOs, NHRIs, academia, members of the public or private institutions, Member States, or UN agencies.

With growing longevity and the increasing inequities that we continue to witness, we must work together in greater numbers and with urgency to bring about a UN convention on the rights of older persons. So that one day soon, on Human Rights Day, we can celebrate this additional achievement for humanity.

We invite you to join the Age With Rights movement and sign and share this petition for older persons’ rights.

The GAROP Steering Group

Footnotes:
1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
2. European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR); American Convention on Human Rights; African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights
3. UN Principles for Older Persons; Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing
5. 2021 Update to the 2012 Analytical Outcome Study on the normative standards in international human rights law in relation to older persons
6. OECD Data Poverty Rate; HelpAge International 2023 Report global report highlights older people’s risk of starvation and extreme poverty due to rising global costs
7. WHO Abuse of Older People 2022; UN Independent Expert 2023 report on violence against and abuse and neglect of older persons
8. OHCHR 2022 A/HRC/49/70 (paragraph 18)
9. OHCHR 2010 General recommendation No. 27 on older women and protection of their human rights; UN Independent Expert 2021 report on Human rights of older women: the intersection between ageing and gender
10. Amnesty International 2023 Ukraine: “They live in the dark”: Older people’s isolation and inadequate access to housing amid Russia’s invasion of Ukraine; Human Rights Watch 2023 Older People Not Spared in Hostilities in Israel/Palestine