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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) is the only recognized non-governmental organization that focuses exclusively on addressing neglect, abuse and violence against older people. Our statement aims at highlighting an important nexus between gender and ageing and the plight of older women. The choices and trade-offs made by women have a tremendous impact on families, on communities and societies at large. At the same time, we believe that comprehensive and holistic social policy implemented at the national level where gender aspects are mainstreamed plays a vital role in empowering women and girls, bringing closer sustainable and resilient societies.

The world is ageing at an unprecedented pace, with greater numbers of women living to older age. Women live longer than men by an average of five years, but this does not mean they are all living their later lives in good health and adequately resourced. Additionally, a growing body of literature documents the significant domino effects of climate change on the planet and on all life.

Older women account for 54 percent of the global population aged 60 years, and 61 percent of those aged 80 years and above. We wish to highlight the nexus between gender, ageing, ageism and their consequent challenges to achieve the full and effective participation in decision-making in public life of older women. Climate change compounds this intersectionality, with public health ramifications already apparent, with greater impact felt by older persons.

As the world ages at an unprecedented rate, with women living longest in all societies, comprehensive and holistic social policies that include gender and age across the life course are vital in empowering girls and women of all ages and to build sustainable and resilient societies.

Challenges

Stigma and myths of ageing paint a misleading picture of frailty and dependence, failing to recognize, value and support older women's capacities, competencies, participation and contributions to family, community, and society. In fact, older women are often at the center of their households and communities; not recipients of care but key providers of care and support to family, friends, and community, even though this too often is both uncompensated for and unacknowledged.

Older women suffer across the world due to disadvantages that are cumulative over the life course. They have higher than average levels of poverty, especially widows and women who live alone, many in substandard housing, who may not have access to appropriate and accessible health care, social protection systems, including floors, and routinely experience discrimination and ageism. Climate change and environmental disasters including the COVID pandemic have made this worse, with catastrophic results for older persons and includes diminished air quality, compromised water supplies, transportation disruptions, and infrastructure failures impacting communication, electricity, transportation, and access to medical providers, food and clean water.

Many older women are denied the right to education, particularly those barred from opportunities when younger because of class and gender. The lack of Lifelong Learning, and access to education inhibits full participation in the labour market as well as everyday activities that require reading, writing and technology skills. This leads to the denial of employment opportunities because of age; an infringement of rights.

Gendered ageism reflects the pervasive but neglected age discrimination against older women. Older women face not just the burden of age discrimination but also the consequences of deep, wide-ranging, and life-long gender discrimination.

Discrimination against girls in education, health and family life from an early age gives way to a gendered construction of the desirability of youth and disdain of older age in women. It is evident in the workplace where women face lower wages, leading to wider poverty gaps, uncertain employment in the formal job market and increasing discrimination in older age.

Extended lockdown under COVID-19 lockdowns, often based on discriminatory age criteria, exposed older women to greater isolation. The reduction and closing of formal care services during the pandemic placed a high burden on many older women, who had to step in and provide care informally.

Older women who are either excluded from promotion at work and training or they drop out of work to care for family members, find themselves outside the technological revolution. Not only can Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) provide support for caregiving but also for maintaining financial autonomy and independence. We need to challenge the prejudice that because a woman is older, she lacks the capacity to understand or learn technology.

Digital technologies can transform the lives of older women and men for the better if these technologies enable older persons to maintain their autonomy and independence, to fully participate in society, have access to services and can make fully informed decisions regarding what technology suits them and provide informed consent.

Digital literacy skills go beyond the basic capacities for operating devices. It should include media literacy, critical thinking, and the ability to identify reliable online information, to prevent abuse and scams and combat ageist posts in social media as we have witnessed in an increased manner during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We need a human rights-based approach to ensure technology is a means for inclusion rather than a tool for further segregation and exclusion. Innovation without access or digital literacy is useless. Let us fight the exclusion and the discrimination that older persons, particularly older women suffer. Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) and Assistive Technologies are not a “luxury,” but an important tool to enable the full enjoyment of human rights.

With up to a third of the world’s population affected by environmental disaster and man-made conflict, HelpAge International and other international organizations have documented sexual and physical violence against older women, as well as how the forced homelessness, poverty and hunger which results from displacement and conflict affects significant numbers of older women. Tools are needed to recognize and identify risk factors in the population of older women affected by crisis. We need to ensure that contact and communications between older persons and their social support networks are established and maintained, and that food supply, economic support and shelters are managed in an age and gender sensitive manner.

The Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of all Human Rights by Older Persons highlights the active roles and vital participation of older women in our communities and society in her address to the General Assembly ([A/76/157](#): Human rights of older women: the intersection between ageing and gender). She urges member states to ensure older women can exercise their human rights and live in dignity. This requires a greater focus on the intersection between ageing and gender, including data collection, research and analysis and more visibility in human rights frameworks and mechanisms.

Recommendations

Governments need to show political will – as duty bearers – to promote and protect older women as rights holders, and to inform them about these rights.

Adopt a life-course approach that recognizes intergenerational solidarity for improving the lives and dignity for women of all ages, everywhere, and views older women as rights holders and full participants for age-inclusive policy planning and service delivery.

Ensure the equal rights of all women and girls across the life course in line with the principles and standards of international human rights bodies.

Ensure alignment of legislation and public policies with human rights principles and standards, have a life course perspective and be age inclusive.

Make ageism illegal together with gender discrimination, as it is a key driver of social and economic discrimination and inequalities in older age.

End discrimination in education at all levels based on age as well as gender and/or disability and ensure universal access to lifelong learning.

Educate young and old persons across the lifespan on sustainable behaviors and the impact on global warming. Engage older women, once educated, in educating others.

Include older women in all planning and decision-making processes and give information on their rights and entitlements.

Remove age barriers to work and extend labour market opportunities to older women.

The express mention of the intersectionality issue that occurs in the case of older women, in accordance with Recommendation 27 CEDAW.

Encourage feminist groups to work on the issue of intersectionality between old age and gender.

Address the problem in Latin America with reference to ethnicity, illiteracy, and poverty, all of which aggravates feminized old age with greater intersectional axes.
