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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Sixtieth session

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, promotes awareness of elder abuse, including neglect, abuse and violence against older women as a global problem.

Definitions of elder abuse include physical, sexual and psychological abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation of older people by a family member, trusted other, formal or informal caregiver or stranger posing as a trusted other. While these are recognized Western categories in elder abuse research, we know that the global human rights perspective recognizes other forms of abuse from a human rights perspective including right of older people to safety in care homes and other institutions, and right to safety in the community free of harmful traditional practices, including those to which older women may be subjected as widows such as accusations of witchcraft and denial of rights to inheritance. The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse promotes revealing cultural differences in ways abuse can be perpetrated in different societies, as well as remedies that are culturally acceptable to victims.

The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse believes that failure to see elder abuse as a violation of the human rights of older persons reflects ageism, and that gender bias plays a large role in violence in older life.

The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse also believes that we only know the extent of the problem by our shared experiences, which is why research that includes the voices of victims themselves is so important.

Abuse looks different and demands different interventions depending on the cultural context, but there are some commonalities across cultures.

Salient Factors in cultural differences include age related differences and service needs and gaps for older men and women. For example, types of harm can include illegal or improper use of money, property or possessions without victim's permission; financial exploitation is often included as a subset of psychological abuse.

Suspicious activities and Red Flags vary or are invisible; and help seeking behaviours may be both culturally mediated and based on gender differences. For example, older women are often absent from discussions regarding age-relevant services such as shelters and hotlines that can address special needs.

The World Health Organization has viewed abuse and violence using an Ecological Model approach, incorporating both cultural and gender.

A perspective shared by human rights expert Rashida Manjoo, Special Rapporteur for Violence Against Women, United Nations. She states that analysis of violence requires examination of four spheres, family, community, state and transnational, categories that are similar to those of the ecological perspective (micro, meso, and macro). The transnational sphere can include — migrant, refugee and asylum seeking older women, thus, broadening the lens for understanding elder abuse. This underscores the human rights perspective that defines older people as rights-holders and states as duty-bearers meaning States are responsible for protecting vulnerable citizens from harm.

Societal Abuse, first recognized by Argentina older adult focus group, convened as subjects for the research study Missing Voices (WHO/INPEA 2002).

Societal Abuse, is often seen as the root of elder abuse. This can include tolerance and even perpetuation of ageism, defined by the late Robert Butler M.D. as age discrimination and inequality intersecting factors compounded by Gender/ Gender Identity/disability/poverty. Dr. Butler, founder of the International Longevity Center coined the term “Ageism”, which he proposed reinforces systems of oppression for older adults.

### **Why focus on older women?**

Older women out-number men in old age. By 2015 there will be 2 billion older adults (60 years of age and older) and the majority will be women.

Women have lower status than men in most societies.

The feminization of ageing brings together intersection of age and gender.

Gender discrimination across the life span is cumulative, with women experiencing greater poverty, incapacitating chronic health problems, illiteracy and low social status in old age.

Older women may face increased risk of extreme poverty/ loss of protective factors after a life time of dependency/loss of male figure that provided both physical and financial security and or safety in some cultures.

Violence, Abuse and Neglect Against older Women includes Witchcraft Accusations, a form of Gender and Age Based Violence often a pretext to perpetrate “Land Grabbing” a form of financial exploitation and abuse against older women. Witchcraft accusations manifest in physical violence and deaths and the ostracizing of older women and some men from family and community is reportedly on the increase in several least developed and developing countries including but not limited to: Africa: Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mozambique, South Africa, and Tanzania; South America: Paraguay; Asia: India, and Nepal; Oceania: Papua New Guinea.

### **Consequences of Violence**

Global evidence reveals that neglect, abuse and violence “... makes older women invisible, disadvantages and discrimination seems inevitable.” (Brownell 2014)

### **Gender Inequality Intensifies in Old Age.**

Relevant documents include:

- Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Rashida Manjoo, recognizing the inter-sectionality and multi-dimensional nature of neglect, abuse and violence against older women.
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Expert group meeting on Violence Against Older Women, Patricia Brownell, PhD, Associate Professor Emerita of Social Service, Fordham University NY, NY, and longtime International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse member wrote the discussion draft on the United Nations website as “neglect, Abuse and Violence Against Older Women”.

- The Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Rosa Kornfeld-Matte's report to the 30th Human Rights Council Session, recognized the multidimensionality of abuse and violence against older persons, and urged that "States should devise an awareness-raising strategy... to address collective prejudice against older persons." "... Target(ing) ... also their social environment..." ([A/HRC/30/43](#) and Add.1-6).
- United Nations Secretary General, Reports in Follow up to the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing ([E/CN.5/2002/PC/2](#) and 2015)

### **Raising Awareness**

An important part of The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse's mission is to raise awareness about elder abuse globally. In 2006 The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse founded World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, designating June 15th as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. In December 2010, the United Nations General Assembly voted World Elder Abuse Awareness Day a United Nations Day. Since the beginning of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, countries, cities and communities and older persons themselves around the world have used this day to promote education and awareness of elder abuse and to promote the Human Rights of older women and men in a culturally sensitive way.

Non-Governmental Organization's such as HelpAge, International, International Federation on Ageing, the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics, and International Longevity Center, global Alliance and ILC, Centres, Argentina and Brazil, joined with The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse to host side events during major United Nations Commission Meetings, in NY, Geneva and Vienna, and the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing. Sessions focused on Violence against older women, Witchcraft and Older Widows to underscore that "Older Women Count". However, contrary to the mandate of Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA 2002) and urgent calls from the Secretary General in his Reports in Follow up to the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, UN-Women's events and programing have yet to include older women on an equal basis with younger women and girls.

Last year, the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse raised a clear issue of age-discrimination against older women in a United Nations Statistical Guideline on Violence Against Older Women, ignoring women over 49 in Domestic Violence Data. The inaction of a United Nations Body and the misguided data message contributes to the systemic problem of invisibility of older women. More concerning is the stark lack of The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women Recommendation 27 reports on the rights of older women, as evidenced by a survey by HelpAge International.

### **Conclusion:**

A Human Rights Approach to addressing Violence against Older Women reveals gaps in International and National laws which condone discrimination and ageism and leads to the inevitable conclusion that there must be a paradigm shift to ensure that older women and men live out their lives in dignity, free of abuse and violence.

That States must live up to their role as duty bearers to protect, promote, and fulfil the Human Rights of Older Person. That United Nations Agencies and Bodies must embrace, promote and mainstream the rights of older women in their programming.

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