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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

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Working paper on ending discrimination against older women through the Convention

1. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women welcomes the convening of the second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid, and urges that special attention be focused on the special needs of older women. The situation of older women is of concern to the Committee, which is the United Nations treaty body in charge of monitoring the implementation of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Convention, often described as the international bill of rights for women, defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

2. The Convention is an important tool for addressing the specific issue of the human rights of older women. Discrimination against women in all areas of their lives throughout their lifespan has a severe and compounded impact on women in old age. The Committee has increasingly used the Convention to point out the discrimination faced by older women in all countries of the world and, in its concluding comments, has suggested ways to improve the quality of life of these women. In particular, the Committee has recommended action, *inter alia*, to address the situation of older women living in poverty, particularly in rural areas; to address the physical, financial and emotional needs of older women; and to improve older women's access to health care.

3. The Committee, therefore, urges States parties to include and integrate women's perspectives into all aspects of the proposed international strategies for action on ageing.

4. The Committee places strong emphasis on the need for Governments to collect and analyse statistical data disaggregated by sex and age as a way to better assess living conditions, including the incidence of poverty and violence against women of all ages, and stresses the importance of formulating and implementing programmes with a life-cycle approach to older women's economic and social well-being and empowerment.



5. Furthermore, the Committee recommends that special attention be paid to improving the further education of older women. The Committee recommends that measures be taken to increase the literacy levels of older women and to reduce the literacy gap between older women in urban and rural areas. It also recommends the design and implementation of gender-sensitive policies and programmes that address the specific needs of older women, including those relating to their physical, mental, social and economic well-being.

6. Older women, for a variety of reasons, including their work as unpaid family members in the informal sector, part-time work, interrupted career patterns and concentration in low-paying jobs, are often insufficiently covered by health insurance and pension schemes. Migration and the breakdown of supportive family structures often leave older women dependent on State assistance the providers of which have not been trained to recognize and meet their specific educational, financial and health needs. The Committee recommends that the care required for older women be addressed through public policy measures in order to establish societal responsibility for their well-being. Care given to them by family members ought to be socially and financially recognized and encouraged.

7. Special recognition should be provided to the contribution of women to their families, the national economy and civil society throughout their life span: stereotypes and taboos that restrict or limit older women from continuing to contribute should be eliminated.
