

ECLAC Follow up Meeting on the December 2007 Brasilia Declaration

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This Global Action on Aging Report describes what happened at the meeting held September 16-17, 2009, following up on the Brasilia Declaration of December 2007. The Government of Brazil's Aging Human Rights Office organized and hosted the session in Rio de Janeiro. Its purpose was clear: to draw up principles that would lead to the creation of a Special Rapporteur who would (1) document the situation of older persons' rights worldwide and produce evidence leading to (2) consideration of a Human Rights Convention at the United Nations.

The governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Spain, France, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, Dominican Republic, and Uruguay sent their representatives. The UN system provided several staff who were expert on older persons, on human rights, and on human rights conventions, to give background information to the participants. These talented persons came from the Population Division of ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), the Organization of American States, Pan-American Health Association, UN Department for Social and Economic Affairs, and the Committee for Economic and Social and Cultural Rights. About twenty NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) from the region took part in the meeting as well. They came from many fields, such as trade unions, public defenders, human rights and anti-violence groups, as well as academicians in gerontology, psychology, planning, disability, health, etc. Finally, four international NGOs affiliated to the UN, including Global Action on Aging, Caritas Alemania, the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics and HelpAge International, sent speakers.

What happened at the session?

First, people who came sensed that they were participating in a historic moment for the aging movement.

Second, they talked of "human rights" with tremendous passion and support. Several recalled their regional history of violence, exploitation, and dictators. Others described the harsh reality of International Monetary Fund-imposed pension cuts and privatization policies. They described "human rights" as a way to insure a "democratic" society. Participants from the region seemed convinced that a human rights convention on ageing would strengthen their rights as citizens.

Third, ECLAC, OAS and UN DESA staff gave excellent tutorials to the group about the material situation of older persons in the region. These experts described how governments collaborate on conventions and listed various approaches to securing political support within governments and from other nations. The participants needed to

master this information as they began their work on a human rights convention process. Everyone in the room learned together. Sitting around a long table, NGOs interspersed themselves among government representatives and ECLAC staff. Organizers provided simultaneous interpretation for those who spoke English, Spanish, and Portuguese so that we could understand one another. Meals and breaks gave everyone another chance to talk and clarify points that had come up as well as enjoy some social time together. I felt a collaborative, informal spirit with people.

Fourth, government speakers dominated the early conversations. Nonetheless, NGOs had many opportunities to enter the discussion and contribute. As an example, when the group wanted to know how NGOs could help in the convention drafting process, GAA described how NGOs prepared language for UN delegates to include in the Disability Rights Convention. Other NGOs at the Brazil meeting gave detailed knowledge of pension issues, or legal proceedings or emerging elder rights issues that were unknown to government representatives.

At the meeting's conclusion, NGOs had participated fully in the discussions, both formal and informal, and had enjoyed the chance to discuss freely with government representatives. NGOs urged the appointment of a Special Rapporteur or other means to assess older persons' human rights and pressed forward for a Human Rights Convention on aging. The NGOs also asked for more ways to pursue specific human rights of older persons, such as those described in new provisions adopted recently at the Organization of American States. They wanted to talk with the UN's Human Rights Council and government missions in Geneva about a Convention and organize events on the human rights of older persons during the Council's sessions.

Governments considered several proposals including a request to the UN Secretary General that he report on the existing human rights of older persons. Second, they suggested that the ECLAC governments discuss the aging rights issues during the Commission for Social Development in February 2009, in the context of the "strategic implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action on Aging." They recommended that the Organization of American States treat aging human rights in the context of the Brasilia Declaration with technical help from specialized agencies.

Governments also wanted to develop a draft resolution calling for a Special Rapporteur on the human rights of older persons that they could present to the Council on Human Rights. Governments present committed themselves to convince other political leaders in the region to support a convention process.

Governments and NGOs agreed on the main steps forward. As the meeting ended, the Brazilian government hosts took these proposals back to their capital in Brasilia to prepare a final report. All of us, we felt, had set in motion a process that would lead eventually to a Human Rights Convention on Aging.