

HelpAge International Statement
Open Ended Working Group on Ageing
First Session, 18-22 April 2011

Current situation of older people's rights

HelpAge International is a global network of eighty affiliated organisations, over two hundred partners and hundreds of older people's associations. We have prepared a briefing paper for this meeting, which you can find on the OEWG website, in which we have presented numerous examples and evidence of how older people's rights are currently being denied across a range of different economic, social and cultural contexts.

But I would like to take this opportunity today to highlight some of the rights that older women and men themselves have identified as being of most importance to them. Too often the voices of older people, particularly the poorest and most marginalised, are absent from the discussion and decision making processes that directly affect their lives. If we are to truly understand the current situation of older people's rights, we must listen to and take into account what older people themselves are saying.

For example in November last year, older people's leaders from Cambodia, China, India, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam gathered to share experiences and agree common issues to take to policy makers.

They identified keys areas where better protection of their rights would not only greatly enhance their existing commitment to contribute to family, community and national economies, but also, they said, reduce inequalities, deliver social cohesion, build institutions and provide economic opportunity for all.

In particular they asked for the extension of their right to social security to lower age levels, emphasizing their good stewardship of such regular income.

They asked for equitable and more affordable access to health services, including through the lifting of user fees.

They asked for guaranteed access to low interest credit.

And they called for legislation to secure these rights and legislation on freedom from discrimination.

Older women and men in other parts of the world have also been demanding that more action is taken to protect their rights.

Last year, as part of the Age Demands Action campaign, older women and men in more than 50 countries called on their national governments to better protect the rights of older people in areas that they identified themselves as needing greater protection.

For example, in Argentina, older women and men identified the renewal of driving licenses for older people and the importance of training bus drivers to better respect older people's needs on public transport as critical to ensuring their rights to continued participation and access to services .

In Cameroon, older people called for improved health care, shelter and housing.

In Burkina Faso older people called for more protection against discrimination and violence against older women.

In Dominica, where older people had already successfully campaigned for a reduction in water prices to secure their right to water, older people prioritized other unaffordable utility prices and the need for ID cards to enable them to access their entitlements.

And in the Netherlands, older people identified isolation as a key barrier to their right to participation.

These are just some examples of the rights that older people themselves have identified as not being adequately protected.

If we are to respect older people as citizens with rights and not just recipients of charity and welfare, we must listen to what they are saying and take this into account as we assess the current situation of their rights and make decisions that will affect their lives.

Thank you.

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