

# 1. Letter to government officials

**Hot topic example:** The leader of the opposition party has just made a speech about the impact of the lockdown on violence against women and girls, calling on the government to step up efforts to address this. It is all over the news and social media.

**Who to influence:** The government will have to respond to this challenge. The Minister of Gender is responsible for violence against women.

**Why a letter to government officials:** Letters to government representatives can trigger an official response or debate within government. Copying other parts of government into the letter can help to maximise the reach of your message. Making the letter open can increase visibility and put pressure on the government to respond.

## Example

Your Excellency,

We, civil society organisations united in our work to ensure older people everywhere enjoy their rights, are writing in relation to the recent speech by the Leader of the Opposition Party on the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women and girls.

This attention to violence against women and girls is very welcome. Women and girls of all ages have been affected by the lockdown, but violence against older women often remains invisible. During the lockdown older women have been made to stay at home for longer and under stricter conditions than younger women. These long periods of isolation are increasing the risk of violence, abuse and neglect against many of them from family members who are spending more time than usual at home. The number of calls from older women to violence helplines has increased significantly since the start of the pandemic and older women have no access to violence support services or shelters.

As one older woman from Townsville told us, "During quarantine, my son and daughter-in-law began to neglect my needs. They don't give me food and medicine on time. My daughter-in-law yells at me and my son has even started to hit me when I don't do what he wants."

Read the full toolkit at [helpage.org/UNconvention](https://helpage.org/UNconvention)

1. Start by saying who you are and why you are writing.

2. Link the hot topic to older people.

3. Provide any evidence to back up your claims you might know from local organisations or the news.

4. Provide a short personal quote from an older woman.

Every woman and girl has the right to be free from violence, abuse and neglect. But older women are being discriminated against because they are older and because they are women. Their rights are invisible in the law. Decision-makers have no place to go to when they need guidance and support to ensure older women's rights are respected, like how to adapt violence prevention services to include older women or make sure support services are available to them.

It doesn't have to be this way. As we rebuild our societies we can choose to do so from a place of equality and dignity. A UN convention on the rights of older women and men would provide the specific answers that governments and others need to make the right decisions around policies and service delivery and build the society we want.

As civil society, we are ready to play our part through constructive dialogue around the solutions available and supporting older women's participation in the process. We look forward to enhancing our partnership with you to advance our common agenda and therefore request a meeting at a time of your convenience to discuss this further.

Sincerely

Copied to

Focal Point on Older Persons, Ministry of Social Affairs  
Chief of UN and International Co-operation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Head of Violence Against Women Unit, Ministry of Gender  
Senior Policy Adviser to the Minister of Gender, Ministry of Gender

5. Explain the need for a UN convention on the rights of older people, using narratives from the toolkit, and connect it with your hot topic.

6. End with your request.

7. Send a copy to the relevant people across the government.

**Follow up actions:** You could also issue a joint NGO statement and issue a press release on violence, abuse and neglect against older women. You might wait until you have (or have not) heard back from the Minister before doing this and include your reaction to the response. If this is an open letter, you could share it with the media, and post it on your website and social media.

**HelpAge**

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