

To: H.E. António Guterres Secretary-General of the United Nations
Cc: Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations
Volker Türk, Assistant Secretary General for Strategic Coordination

27 May 2020

Joint letter to the UN Secretary-General from civil society organisations welcoming the Secretary General's brief on older persons and COVID-19 and requesting a plan of action

Dear Mr. Secretary General,

We are writing as **X** civil society organisations from around the world to congratulate you for the UN Policy Brief on 'The impact of COVID-19 on older persons'. This is an important and welcome intervention from the highest level of the UN at a time when the lives of older persons are at risk and their human rights are under attack. We welcome recognition of the multiple and significant risks older persons are facing at this time and the pandemic's amplifying effects on pre-existing inequalities, ageism and discrimination, and challenges accessing health and social care and humanitarian assistance.

We are now requesting your support to ensure the action of the UN system to secure the way forward you identified in your brief. These actions recognise that older persons have long been subject to inadequate protection of their human rights and overlooked in global development and humanitarian efforts as well as in national policies and programmes. We believe there are opportunities in the recovery from this disaster to build back better and set the stage for a more inclusive and equitable society. We must all be concerned that the pandemic has exposed significant gaps in the UN system and also across sectors and disciplines, at a time when solidarity across countries and generations is needed the most. Only urgent action can fulfil the UN's mission to leave no one behind.

As you will be aware, the UN has no system-wide policy or strategy on ageing and older persons, no lead UN agency and no formal mechanism for collaboration between UN bodies. In the COVID-19 reality, the gaps in coordination and leadership have led to disparities between the objective risks and needs of older persons, their visibility within agency response plans and their prioritisation within the overall response.

The UN has a clear mandate from member states to enhance leadership and coordination. Over the past two weeks, 146 member states have signed on to a statement in support of your policy brief and recognition of the imperative to act in solidarity and to strengthen global and national responses to address the rights of older persons. GA resolution 74/125 requests the UN to enhance collaboration with regional commissions, funds and programmes on ageing issues, to increase technical cooperation efforts, expand the role of the regional commissions on ageing issues, facilitate the coordination of national and international non-governmental organisations on ageing and enhance cooperation with all relevant stakeholders.

In light of this, we are inviting and encouraging you to share the plan to address the inclusion of older persons with actions to uphold their rights across the UN system. We hope these will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Immediate steps to mainstream older persons into COVID-19 responses
- Measures to strengthen UN-wide policy and coordination at all levels, including through the adoption of a system-wide strategy on older persons and ageing

- Commitment by the executive heads of the organisations of the UN system to analyse the gaps in the strategies and programmes of UN agencies, funds and programmes and present these at the earliest possible Chief Executive Board meeting to plan corrective action
- Acceleration of efforts by the General Assembly's working group to develop proposals for an international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons
- Enhanced capacity to provide technical support to governments to strengthen older persons' rights
- Strengthened and support the participation of older persons in UN-led intergovernmental fora

As civil society organisations, we stand alongside you and are ready to play our part through constructive dialogue on the solutions available, and by supporting strengthened participation of older people directly in the work of the UN at all levels. We look forward to enhancing our partnerships with the UN to advance our common agenda to leave no one behind.

This letter is supported by:

HelpAge International

Xxx