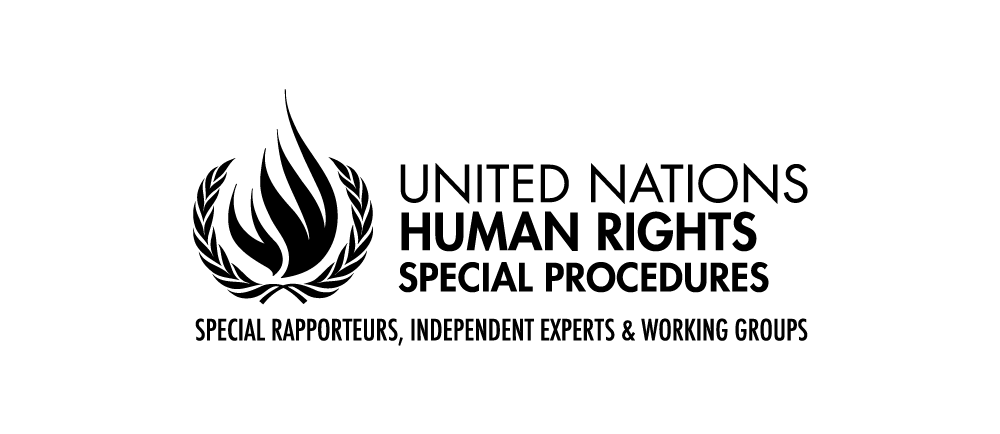
### **Check against delivery**



**Claudia MAHLER**

**Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons**

**Berlin, 6 October 2021**

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

76th session

Mr. Chairperson,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to address you for the second time in my capacity as Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons.

One year ago, my presentation focused on the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on older persons and the way it magnified existing violations of their human rights. Indeed, much analysis and discourse over the past year examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on different groups, including older persons and women.

Distressing reports about the isolation, neglect and lack of access to adequate healthcare by older persons made headlines worldwide. Gendered impacts were highlighted with setbacks in education, labour participation and equal pay and levels of violence against women raising.

That said, the specific impacts experienced by older women and the way the intersection between older age and gender affects the enjoyment of their human rights received limited attention. This illustrates a more general invisibility of the unique forms of inequality and discrimination that older persons face based on their gender, disability, ethnic origin, migrant status and other intersectional factors. This is one of the reasons why I have dedicated the present report to the human rights of older women.

Mr. Chairperson,

Global ageing has a female face as women constitute the majority of older persons, especially at advanced ages. Older women play key and diverse roles in our communities. They are leaders in politics, business, culture, civic engagement, and many other sectors. They are activists promoting change and a better future for younger generations. They are caregivers and volunteers that enable their communities and families to thrive.

But they are largely overlooked in policy and decision-making and often portrayed in stereotypical and patronizing manner as nurturing and wrinkly grandmothers that vanish from public life as they get older.

The combination of ageist and sexists attitudes, for instance the perception of older women as unproductive, unattractive and unimportant, undermines the enjoyment of their human rights. For example, the assumption that older women are not sexually active and desirable means that their sexual and reproductive health is disregarded and that sexual violence against older women remains a taboo.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My report examines inequalities and discrimination experienced by older women in different aspects of life. These inequalities and discrimination do not suddenly appear in older age, but are rather accumulated over the life course and then aggravated in later life.

The cumulative disadvantages of lower labour force participation, the gender pay gap, interrupted employment patterns due to caregiving, and higher prevalence of part-time and informal work means that women often receive lower or no pensions. Moreover, many women are excluded from acquiring, accumulating and controlling assets and property over their life-course, including due to discriminatory inheritance regimes and practices. Many women therefore reach older age with lower levels of education and learning opportunities, fewer savings, assets and property, and lower social security. This significantly hinders the full enjoyment of their human rights, especially the rights to an adequate standard of living and social security.

Moreover, these disadvantages put older women in a situation of heightened vulnerability to poverty, isolation, violence, abuse, and neglect. Women tend to live longer but often do not have the necessary resources and support to meet their evolving needs. In this regard, relying exclusively on families for care and support is not a satisfactory nor a sustainable solution for different reasons, such as lack of resources and guidance to provide adequate care or family members living far away due to increasing mobility.

Distinguished delegates,

States have the responsibility to ensure that older women are able to fully enjoy their human rights, including the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to health, the right to be free from violence and abuse, the right to an autonomous and independent living, the right to participate in public affairs, and the right to an effective remedy. Older women must first be viewed as rights-holders rather than beneficiaries of social welfare policies. Only through such a human-rights based approach will inclusive, equitable and age-friendly societies be achieved and the Sustainable Development Goals realized.

To this effect, I call upon States to integrate a human rights based approach in their policies and laws. A gender dimension should be mainstreamed into all legislation and policies on ageing and older persons, and, vice versa, an ageing perspective needs to be integrated in all frameworks on gender equality. This must include combatting ageism and sexism and related stereotypes as well as systematic collection of disaggregated data to capture the lived realities of older women.

I further urge States to consider the situation of older women in international and regional human rights mechanisms and policy platforms on ageing, older persons and women.

Mr. Chairperson,

Distinguished delegates,

The COVID-19 pandemic brought more attention and awareness to the challenges older persons face in exercising their rights. It furthermore highlighted that there are gaps in the existing human rights framework which leaves older persons behind.

More needs to be done to ensure a gender perspective is part of the discussion as well as of recovery efforts and policy-making. This is all the more important as the disproportionately gendered effects of the pandemic mean that women are likely to continue reaching older age in a disadvantaged position preventing them to fully enjoy their human rights. It is crucial that the voices of older women be heard and their role and contribution to our societies and communities recognized.

I thank you for your attention.

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