Thank you, Madam President.

I am honored to be speaking at this important panel.

Let me start by thanking the other speakers and OHCHR for the analytical study drawing attention to the impact climate change is having on the rights of older people. We appreciate the Independent Expert’s leadership on advancing the human rights of older people.

At Human Rights Watch we have been working on both the rights of older people and the human rights implications of climate change for several years.

In our work on the climate crisis, we are finding that those already marginalized are often most impacted by climate change. Most recently we have investigated how frequent droughts are worsening malnutrition among Indigenous children in [Colombia](https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/08/colombias-indigenous-children-are-casualties-climate-change) and how increasing heat in the United States and Germany is threatening healthy pregnancies. Last year, we documented how Indigenous peoples in Canada, including many older people, are struggling to access food as a result of rising temperatures. We are also finding that governments are still not doing enough to mitigate climate change and to help those most impacted populations adapt to it.

In our work on older people we found that millions of older people around the world experience human rights violations every year, ranging from age-based discrimination and social and political exclusion, to abuses in nursing facilities, neglect in conflict and refugee camps, and barriers to healthcare and other essential services. Most of these abuses go undocumented and those responsible not held to account. Covid-19 has exposed the dangerous price of ignoring the rights of older people.

It is only very recently that we have started to look specifically at the intersection of climate change and the rights of older people. So instead of presenting findings and recommendations from our research on each of the issues, I would like to use my time to talk about some of our insights from the initial scoping work highlighting some of the gaps we have identified.

Over the past few months we have carried out desk research examining the available data on climate change and older people in more than 10 countries . This involved examining existing data published in government reports, academic studies, media reports, and climate-related policies. Our focus was on heat-related impacts because of the link that has been established between heat mortality and climate change and the impacts of heat specifically on the health of older people: for example, the impact aging has on thermoregulation.

We made three observations that I would like to share with you:

First, there is robust data on the number of older people among those who have died from heatwaves. For example, Japan’s most recent Heat Stroke Action Plan identified that between 2010 and 2019, 80 percent of the heat wave deaths in Japan were people 65 and older. In the past two decades, heat-related deaths for older persons in the US almost doubled, reaching a record high of 19,000 deaths in 2018, according to estimates [issued](https://www.lancetcountdownus.org/2020-lancet-countdown-u-s-brief/) in December 2020 by the medical journal Lancet.

Second, health impacts of heat on older people are much less documented or monitored. We observed that while many countries have good data on heat mortalities, they are not documenting other health impacts disaggregated by age. This absence of government monitoring on other health impacts exists despite evidence across academic research showing that older people are particularly impacted.

The gap of health monitoring and related barriers is especially concerning for older people with disabilities. For people to cool down they need a healthy cardiovascular system and internal organs. Some people, including older people and those with heart, respiratory, and other chronic health conditions, are more likely to get sick or die in high temperatures. Higher Temperatures have been associated with increased risks of hospital admissions, including in emergency departments, for experiences diagnosed as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, alcohol and substance misuse, dementia, and self-harm. Similarly, heatwaves may prevent older individuals who are especially affected due to chronic health conditions from leaving their homes and accessing the services they require. However, these specific barriers are often not being monitored. The same can be said for specific impacts on older women who often live in isolation and may experience distinct barriers.

Lastly, we found that government responses to heatwaves do not always account for the needs of older people in addressing some of the health impacts I have previously mentioned.

Probably a result of the lack of monitoring, there are gaps in how government adaptation plans are addressing the role of isolation and the different living situations of older people, including those who are affected by energy poverty and those living in institutions .

In our view the gap in data and monitoring of climate impacts on older people we identified in our initial research is likely one of the main reasons why their needs are not addressed. Thankfully, many older people are around the world are raising their voices to change this, drawing attention to both their needs and their efforts to protect the planet.

Governments have a human rights obligation to protect the rights of older people and other vulnerable groups from adverse climate impacts including by measures to urgently reduce GHG emissions, such as removing fossil fuel subsidies, and by supporting individuals and communities to adapt to climate change. This adaptation element requires states to consider the impacts on different groups, including older persons, and to design targeted measures to assist them. But they can only do this with better data and research.

Let me conclude by saying that the lack of data and knowledge about the climate impacts on older people speaks to a broader need for a more focused discussion at the Human Rights Council on the human rights dimensions of climate change.

The climate crisis is a human rights crisis that is impacting a broad range of rights of persons in all corners of the earth and with severe and disproportionate impacts on a broad range of groups, from older people, children, women, Indigenous peoples and persons living in poverty. It is now time for an on-going and more systematic engagement on climate change at the Human Rights Council, by creating a dedicated Special Procedures mandate on human rights and climate change.

Thank you for your attention.