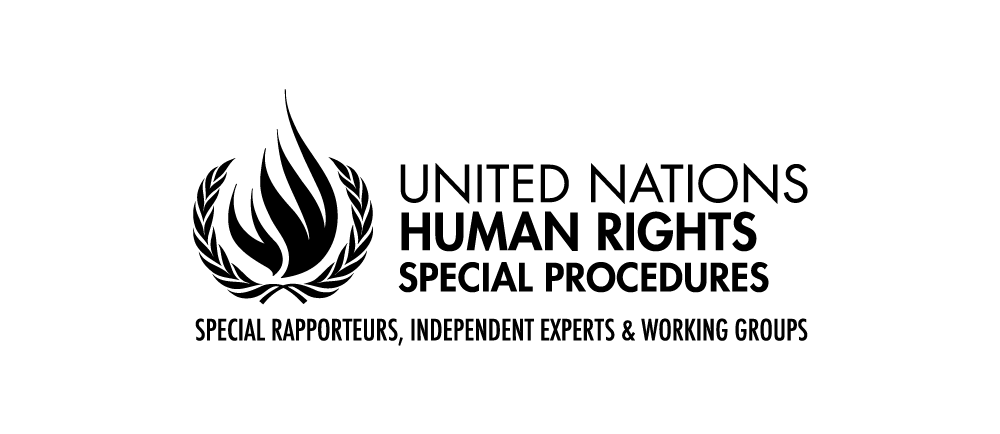
### **Check against delivery**



**Claudia MAHLER**

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

**20 September 2021**

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

48th session

President,

Excellences,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor for me to address you in person for the first time from Geneva in my capacity as Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons. I look forward to the exchange with States, civil society organizations, national human rights institutions, United Nations agencies and all stakeholders during this interactive dialogue. I would also like to express my warm thanks for the multiple contributions I have received to the calls for inputs for my thematic reports and for the positive engagements over the past year.

Although meetings remained virtual during my first year as the Independent Expert, I had the chance to speak in numerous events and conferences on different topics related to the human rights of older persons. I was also able to engage with key stakeholders in all regions of the world, including by commenting on policies and strategies. I am nevertheless hopeful that it will be possible to resume having in-person engagement with all stakeholders as well as to interact with older persons more directly to hear about their lived realities and human rights concerns.

Excellences,

While the pandemic affected everyone, it had a disproportionate impact on older persons and magnified existing violations of their rights. As I noted in last year’s report on the impact of COVID-19 on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons (A/75/205), prevalent ageist attitudes were visible in the form of verbal abuse and negative images targeting older persons in the media and public debates, especially at the onset of the pandemic. Such images and attacks often resulted in breaches of human rights and denial of dignity of older persons. This also translated in age discrimination within different sectors, including health care and social services.

According to the Global report on Ageism released earlier this year by the WHO, one in two persons are ageist against older persons. I welcome the report with its evidence and experiences from the ground as a fruitful basis for discussion which increases global awareness of ageism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to clarify and describe what ageism means. Ageism are stereotypes, prejudices and/or discriminatory actions or practices against older persons based on their chronological age or on a perception that the person is “old”. Every individual has internalized stereotypes and prejudices about ageing. At the structural and societal levels, policies and laws reflect perceptions of the limited and pre-defined roles ascribed to older persons, mainly as recipients of assistance and care. Ageist policies perceive them in a generalized way, despite the fact that older persons are one of the most diverse segment of the global population.

Ageism leads to age discrimination and hinders older persons from the full enjoyment of their human rights. It negatively impacts all generations and contributes to an intergenerational divide. Despite increased policy attention on ageing, deeply rooted negative perceptions continue to underpin policy and practice.

Excellences,

Due to profoundly individual, societal and structural internalized stereotypes, age discrimination is anticipated as a fact of life. This is also perceptible in international human rights law which lacks a clear and comprehensive prohibition of discrimination based on age in contrast to existing treaties that obligate States parties to take steps to eliminate racism, sexism and ableism. This gap may to some extent explain why differential treatment based on age can wrongly be considered as permissible discrimination under international and national law.

Moreover, ageism aggravates other forms of inequalities based on gender, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation, ethnic origin, and other grounds. In order to ensure that older persons realize the potential of longer lives in dignity and equality, it is important to address the way old age intersects with other forms of inequality and creates serious barriers to participate actively in society.

For example, the intersection of ageism and sexism means that older women’s status deteriorates faster compared to that of men. Older women are often expected to continue their caregiving roles while neglecting their physical and mental health, well-being and economic independence. In many countries, the gender pay gap persists and even increases with age for women close to or after retirement age.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ageism and age discrimination profoundly shape the lived realities of older persons. In health-care, older patients can be exposed to patronizing and dismissive language from health professionals who may disregard their opinions and choices regarding their treatment. The perception of older persons as unimportant and disposable and a burden to society is a driver of violence, abuse and neglect. Emergency policies and plans often do not consider the situation and needs of older persons, which results in inadequate services and relief, with potentially serious consequences for their lives and health. The negative effects of ageism and age discrimination are evident in many other spheres, including employment, financial services, and the media, among others.

Countering ageism and eliminating age discrimination is a starting point for the full enjoyment of the human rights of older persons. There cannot be dignity and equality of rights if older persons continue to be viewed primarily as beneficiaries of care and support that create pressure on budgets and resources. A human rights-based approach is absolutely needed to shift this welfare paradigm to one recognizing older persons as rights bearers’ that have the same guarantees of dignity, equality, participation, autonomy and independence during the entire life course. States must accelerate the development of policies, laws and practical measures to combat all forms of ageism and age discrimination.

A comprehensive international treaty on the human rights of older persons containing a clear prohibition of age discrimination would enable such paradigm shift and provide much needed standards and guidance how to practically and meaningfully promote, fulfill and protect the human rights if older persons.

With the harsh lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic about the state of the human rights of older persons, action is needed now at all levels. In this respect, I am particularly encouraged by the initiative before this Council of a draft resolution on the human rights of older persons with a specific focus on ageism and age discrimination.

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to end my statement by thanking all the stakeholders who have engaged with me over the past year. While the COVID pandemic prevented all of us from travelling, I am pleased that next month I will be undertaking my first official country visit to Finland. I am grateful to the Finnish authorities for accepting the visit and look forward to positive engagement with more States in the future as country visits become more regular again. Given the dramatic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the rights of older persons, it will be essential to gather first-hand evidence and exchange on what practical lessons can be drawn.

I very much look forward to our interactive dialogue today and thank you all for your attention and support.

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