

Press Release: *Close of the 14th Session of the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing*

TORONTO, June 4, 2024 – As a non-governmental organization (NGO) in attendance at the 14th session of the United Nations Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA), the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) is pleased that a substantive decision on the human rights of older persons was adopted by Member States at the OEWGA. The decision addresses gaps in the international human rights system regarding the protection of older persons and presents a number of options for closing them, including a new UN convention on the rights of older persons. Much work is still needed to secure a UN convention but this decision paves a positive way forward.

For 14 years the OEWGA has met and been provided with over 900 documents outlining the gaps in the protection of the human rights of older persons. While many governments have legislation, policies and programmes for older persons, there is no single legally binding document which establishes a common, global understanding of definitions and minimum standards of practice in relation to the human rights of older persons.

As shared by IFA's UN Representative Frances Zainoeddin:

“It took a convention in 1979 to put the world on notice to condemn discrimination against women and to the need to protect their human rights. It took a convention in 1989 to put the world on notice that children also have rights that must be protected and it took a convention in 2006 to put the world on notice that persons with disabilities also have rights which must be protected.”

The decision adopted by Member States on recommendations regarding the identification of possible gaps in the protection of the human rights of older persons and how best to address them will be presented by the Chair of OEWGA to the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly, which convenes in September 2024. While UN Member States continue to deliberate on how to respond to possible gaps, IFA and other human rights organizations and advocates will continue to highlight that older people have rights which are best protected through an international legally binding instrument. IFA commends the effort and dedication of all those who participated in the OEWGA and call for the UN General Assembly to request that the Human Rights Council consider and take action on the recommendations contained in the decision adopted by the OEWGA on 21 May. These recommendations include the non-exclusive consideration of an internationally legally binding instrument to promote, protect and ensure the recognition of the human rights of older persons, the addition of optional protocols to existing human rights treaties, the promotion of measures against ageism, and enhancement of capacity to collect age-disaggregated data amongst other options.

It is critical that the full, effective and meaningful participation of older persons, their representative organisations, civil society, and national human rights institutions are supported in any further action. This means ensuring that these individuals and organizations have an impact on decisions and are not only tokenistic observers. As our global population ages, it is more important than ever that we have an international mechanism in place to protect not only current but future generation of older persons.