

**Commission on the Status of Women, 57<sup>th</sup> Session, 4 – 15 March 2013**

**General Discussion, March 11 2013**

**Joint statement on behalf of Gray Panthers, HelpAge International, International Association for Homes and Services for the Ageing, International Longevity Center Global Alliance, International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse**

Population ageing is defining the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Women experience different forms of violence throughout their lives, including in older age. As women live longer and the numbers of older women increase, so will the numbers exposed to different forms of violence and abuse in older age.

Older women are subjected to multiple and intersecting discrimination on the basis of their older age, sex and other characteristics. Many older women live with the cumulative impact of a lifetime of violence and discrimination as well as experiencing different forms of violence in older age, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence and neglect.

Data on violence against women is rarely collected over the age of 49 and when it is, it is usually limited to sexual and physical violence. As a result the different forms of violence that women experience in older age are not being captured in research and older women and the different forms of violence they are subjected to continue to be excluded from the debate and responses on violence against women.

For example, in the Beijing +15 review in 2010, only four out of 121 national responses to a questionnaire sent out by the Division for the Advancement of Women mentioned violence against older women and only a further seven included information on elder abuse more broadly. UN Women does not report that older women are disproportionately subjected to elder abuse in its statistics on violence against women and girls. The preparatory expert group meeting and online consultation for this 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women also failed to include violence against older women.

The current international human rights system does little to shed light on violence against older women nor support governments to understand their obligations to protecting and promoting older women's rights. CEDAW's General Recommendation No. 27 on older women's rights is a major step forward in understanding the specific nature of age and gender related violence. However, other existing human rights standards do not adequately cover issues of critical importance for older women, such as violence and elder abuse.

Action at the domestic level varies, resulting in inconsistent levels of protection across different countries. Some countries, for example Kenya, have provisions in their constitutions protecting older people from violence. Others have national legislation protecting older people from violence and abuse, for example South Africa and India. Others cite older people as specifically vulnerable in their domestic violence legislation, for example Ghana or imply elder abuse is a form of domestic violence such as in Namibia. This patchwork of protection undermines the universality of human rights and every woman's right to freedom from violence and abuse throughout every stage of her life.

As with all forms of violence, elder abuse and violence against older women is preventable.

Coordinated action to improve policy responses at the national and international level on elder abuse, with specific regard to violence against older women, is urgently needed. Education and awareness campaigns are essential to change negative social and cultural attitudes towards older women.

However, there is a paucity of quality research on prevalence and prevention, meaning that evidence-based programmes are few and far between. To address this data on violence against women beyond the age of 49 must be collected, disaggregated and disseminated; measurement of psychological and economic violence must be improved and research on under-documented forms of violence against women, including psychological and economic violence must be increased.