

Dear Heads of State,

As the meeting of the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing gets underway in New York today, we urge you to act to protect the rights of older people.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights states in Article 1 that 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'. This does not change with age.

Despite this, older people are some of the poorest and most neglected in the world; widely and routinely overlooked, patronised, belittled and mistreated. Ageism is tolerated at family, community and institutional levels, on a global scale. In most countries it is still considered acceptable to deny people work, access to healthcare, education or the right to participate in government purely because of their age.

A UN Convention on the rights of older people is essential to ensure older people can realise their rights in our increasingly ageing societies. The number of people over 60 will increase to over 2 billion by 2050, with more than 80% living in developing countries. More and more people will be directly affected by age discrimination.

The fact is; existing human rights mechanisms do not protect the rights of older people. Research by HelpAge International indicates that in Peru, 83% of people over 50 years of age have experienced abuse; in Mozambique the figure is 74%; in India, more than a third of older people who had been abused reported facing it almost daily; and in Germany and Sweden over 30% reported being abused. A UN convention would protect older people's rights to freedom from discrimination and violence; it would ensure their rights to social security, healthcare, work, property and inheritance.

Over 200,000 older activists across the world, predominantly in poor countries, are demanding their voices be heard. They have joined HelpAge's *Age Demands Action* (ADA) campaign and have signed the ADA petition calling for a UN Convention for the rights of older people. We are proud to add our voices to theirs.

Discrimination and prejudice against any group in society are morally and legally unacceptable. This weeks' meeting at the UN is a critical moment to change things and enable everyone – young and old - to lead dignified, secure lives as equal members of society.

This is not a minority issue. We are all growing older. Are we prepared to lose our rights along the way?

If not, the time to act is now.