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## Generations United: Submission to the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing on the Issue of a UN Convention on Human Rights for Older Persons

*Generations United is accredited in consultative status to ECOSOC*

Generations United strongly supports the initiative to establish a United Nations Convention to strengthen older people's rights.

Earlier work done at the UN established the United Nations Principles for Older Persons [Resolution 46/91 adopted by the General Assembly in 1991], which Generations United supports and proposes as a partial basis for discussions of older person's human rights. These principles include:

**-Independence:** Older persons should have access to food, water, shelter, clothing, health care, work and other income-generating opportunities, education, training and a life in safe environments.

**-Participation:** Older people should remain integrated into community life and participate actively in the formulation of policies affecting their well-being.

**-Care:** Older persons should have access to social and legal services and to health care so that they can maintain an optimum level of physical, mental and emotional well-being. This should include full respect for dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy.

**-Self-fulfillment:** Older persons should have access to educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources and be able to develop their full potential.

**-Dignity:** Older persons should be able to live in dignity and security, be free of exploitation and physical or mental abuse and be treated fairly regardless of age, gender, and racial or ethnic background.

Generations United would add one additional concept of older persons – one that makes an important contribution to social integration and which supports several of the Principles outlined above:

**-Social contribution:** many older persons desire and are willing to contribute to their communities and families in ways that support younger generations and add value to their societies

Generations United supports the document: "Strengthening Older People's Rights: Towards a UN Convention. A resource for promoting dialogue on creating a new UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons", which was produced collaboratively by nine NGO's including HelpAge International and the International Federation on Ageing.

The following examples are cited from this publication with the implicit endorsement of Generations United:

- Older people's right to freedom from discrimination
- Older people's right to freedom from violence
- Older people's right to social security
- Older people's right to health
- Older people's right to work ["and contribute socially in a variety of ways" – added by GU]
- Older people's right to property and inheritance rights

This is a core set of human rights for older persons – that supports the Principles cited above – and which could be greatly augmented and rationalized through a UN convention

Generations United believes that a UN Convention on Human Rights for Older Persons is essential for the following reasons [these are provided in addition to those offered in the document cited above]

1. There are unique features to the denial of rights for older persons:

-The denial of rights is usually intergenerational. Since the abuse of older persons most often occurs from other generations, it makes sense to use intergenerational policies or social strategy to address these issues.

-It is often compounded by gender and disability discrimination. This creates a "package" of features that can have uniquely negative and intractable consequences for older persons. This may demand attention focused through a special convention rather than a generic approach to addressing everyone's rights together

2. Social policy recommendations could be an important part of any effort to address the abuse of older persons rights, especially with the reported increases in elder abuse associated with population ageing. That is – establishing a clear set of human rights for older persons may not be sufficient to ensure that human rights abuses are addressed. It may be necessary to create a set of recommended social policies that combat age stereotyping, encourage social integration and tap into the important human resources offered by older [and younger] persons. Experiences in the intergenerational service field suggest that mobilizing older adults can provide valuable educational, mentoring, and economic gains for younger people. In a similar way, school-age youth can provide valuable support for older adults who are frail, visually, impaired etc. that allow them to remain in their communities and maintain important levels of independence. These types of services cost very little when compared to the economic sector but produce enormous returns. In addition to the tangible benefits, there are very important attitude changes that take place. Positive attitudes move people away from discrimination. The social integration that results is one of the intangible benefits. And it is worth noting that socially integrated societies are sustainable.