SPECIAL PROCEDURES
UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Statement by the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Claudia Mahler

15 June, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

End violence against older persons in armed conflicts

(GENEVA, 13 June 2025) The world is ageing. According to current projections by UN DESA, by 2050, one in six people globally will be aged 65 or older. While this shift signals longer lives, it also carries an urgent warning: more older persons will be at risk of violence, abuse, and neglect, particularly in times of crisis.

In today's context of overlapping global emergencies, including climate change, armed conflicts, economic instability and pandemics, support and protection systems are increasingly overstretched, leaving older persons more exposed to neglect, abuse, and violence as resources become scarcer and protections weaken.

In this environment, how can we ensure older persons are empowered to demonstrate their strength, wisdom and resilience, and promote their right to live free from abuse and discrimination? The answers are even trickier when considered in the context of armed conflicts. Many older persons have strong ties to their homes, communities and lands, or have physical limitations, which can lead to them remaining in conflict zones while younger populations flee or are forcefully displaced. This increases the risk of older persons facing abuse, violence, and deprivation. Still, estimations indicate that less than 1% of humanitarian projects have activities specifically targeting older persons.

Recent humanitarian crises have once again revealed how older persons are routinely excluded from evacuation planning, shelter access, and humanitarian aid prioritization. For those experiencing intersectional and multiple forms of discrimination (factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability, migration or displacement status, Indigenous status, sexual orientation and gender identity), the situation is even more critical, both in public and private settings. The various types of abuse are not mutually exclusive, and often worsen the impact on older persons when they are experienced simultaneously.

While I am pleased that awareness on violence and abuse against older persons has increased since 2023, when I published a report on the topic, many obstacles remain. Research into violence against older people lags behind the progress achieved in understanding the extent and causes of violence against other groups, such as women and children. This knowledge and data gap results in a lack of policies, prevention measures and protection.

In order to strengthen the protection of older persons against violence and abuse in the context of armed conflicts, we must fully recognize their human rights, meaningfully include their participation in humanitarian responses, and ensure that enough resources are dedicated to studying the issue and improving the response by Member States, international organizations and civil society.

I am currently preparing a thematic report on the human rights of older persons in armed conflict, which will be presented to the General Assembly in October 2025. I am grateful for the contributions received from Governments, national human rights institutions, and civil society, and I will do my utmost to ensure that this critical issue is brought to the forefront of the international agenda.

The drafting of a dedicated legally binding instrument on the rights of older persons can provide the necessary legal framework to guarantee their dignity, visibility, and equal treatment in daily life and in times of crisis – shifting the narrative from vulnerability to resilience.

ENDS

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