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SPECIAL PROCEDURES
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Mr. President,

Excellencies and delegates,

Distinguished attendees, dear colleagues and friends,

It is my honour to address you today as Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons. First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has engaged with the mandate over the past year, and to those who have contributed valuable input to the preparation of my thematic as well as my country reports.

This year's report explores the intersection of two fundamental and inseparable rights: the right to social protection and the right to work for older persons. It points out the challenges faced by older persons when these rights are denied and evolutions societies that recognize ageing not as a burden, but as a natural and valuable part of life.

The context for this report is urgent: People are living longer than ever before, which is a success, but it also requires adaptation of our social, political, and economic institutions. By 2050, the number of people aged sixty and over is expected to double. In some regions, older persons with all their different lived realities will make up more than a third of the total population. Yet all too often, ageing populations are spoken of only as a cost and burden, and it is not taken into account that inaction will lead to much higher costs for our societies. The purpose of this report is to challenge those assumptions and place older persons where they belong: at the centre of a human rights-based approach to social protection and work.

The obstacles older persons face are not simply individual or circumstantial but are embedded in a broader system. They are rooted in structural ageism. This has an impact on institutions, laws, policies, and society as a whole. Older persons are often excluded from labour markets based on ageist stereotypes, in social protection schemes and their criteria, and in narratives that depict older persons as passive recipients of social allowances and care rather than holders of rights and active contributors to society. Structural ageism denies dignity and perpetuates invisibility

Mr. President,

The right to work and the right to social protection are interconnected and influence one another. The right to work is essential for participation, autonomy, and dignity. Work provides not only income but also meaning, a basis for social inclusion and a sense of belonging – including the notion of usefulness. Excluding people from work based on age denies them a core dimension of human life. However, the right to work cannot be fully realized without social protection. Without adequate pensions or health coverage, older persons are forced to work under conditions of precarity and exploitation. Access to work without social protection leaves people vulnerable to unexpected risks, such as illness or the general insecurities of older age.

Within the scope of my findings, I would also like to emphasize that the right to work does not expire at a certain age. It is a lifelong right, and older persons must be free to choose if, how and under what conditions they participate in the labour market. Older persons already make up a growing proportion of the global workforce. Their skills, experience, and contributions are invaluable. Excluding them is a waste of human potential. Therefore, labour markets need to adapt to ensure their inclusion for as long as they want. This could involve offering flexible and decent work opportunities, investing in lifelong learning, recognizing both paid and unpaid contributions, and ensuring that older persons are not forced out of work due to prejudice.

Turning to the subject of social protection, I would like to advocate for its universality and adequacy. Social protection systems must guarantee every older person a minimum standard of living with dignity. This means providing income security through pensions and other schemes, ensuring access to affordable healthcare, and protecting people against life's uncertainties. Social protection systems must be able to adapt to crises – as the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated – and be responsive to the needs of those in rural areas, those living in poverty and those facing multiple forms of discrimination.

Excellencies colleagues and friends

to make it more concrete:

- Old-age allowances are often insufficient to reduce poverty, for instance because the whole amount is used for medical expenses. In some cases, the allowance is just 10 per cent of the minimum monthly wage.
- Persons with lower incomes enjoy lower social protection through contributory systems, to be at a higher risk of living in poverty and to have to rely on non-contributory allowances. They must also work to achieve an income, which leads to exploitation in the informal sector.
- Particularly in the case of low-paid workers and those with interrupted careers, pension levels do not always meet the needs of older persons, eg. older women.
- Migrants, in particular undocumented migrants, might also lack access to the social security system of their destination country and therefore not be able to pay contributions or receive benefits.

Distinguished attendees,

I urge States to adopt a human rights-based approach in all areas of social protection and labour market policies and laws. This involves designing systems that uphold the principles of autonomy, dignity, non-discrimination, and participation. It means tackling ageist assumptions that promote exclusion. It also means ensuring that older persons themselves are actively involved in shaping the policies that affect them, rather than being treated as passive recipients.

Furthermore, I call on governments to strengthen social protection floors to guarantee a minimum level of income security and access to essential services for all, regardless of age or previous employment history.

I would like to emphasize the importance of inclusive and flexible labour markets that enable older persons to remain in or re-enter employment under conditions that respect their choices and capabilities. Another important issue is data: without disaggregated information about the situation of older persons, policies will remain inadequate to their realities.

We must act with a vision; we can harness the opportunities of longevity to create more inclusive and sustainable conditions for everyone. Furthermore, the right to work and social protection are directly linked to the Sustainable Development Goals. In

particular, Goal 1, Target 1.3, highlights the importance of social protection systems for all, including older persons. Guaranteeing income security in older age is essential for reducing poverty and upholding older persons' right to social protection.

Excellencies,

While many states are facing economic challenges and limited budgets, we cannot deny that choices must be made. However, there is a strong argument that investing in social protection and inclusive employment is never a lost investment, but rather a driver of stability. The cost of inaction is far higher.

I want to remind you that ageism is not just abstract concepts but lived realities for older persons. Their stories remind us of the human experiences behind the statistics. They tell us about the barriers they face when trying to access pensions, the discrimination they experience when looking for employment, the insecurities of informal work and the burden of waiting in long queues to receive social benefits. These testimonies are vital They are lived experience and challenge us to act with urgency.

Mr. President, colleagues and friends

A society that respects the rights of older persons is a society that respects the rights of everyone. By guaranteeing social protection and decent work for older persons, we can strengthen solidarity between generations, reduce poverty, and affirm the dignity of every individual. We are also preparing for the future, as today's younger generations will be the older persons of tomorrow.

Excellencies,

Despite the turbulent times we are currently living in, I am convinced that, with political will, commitment and respect for human rights, we can build societies in which ageing is met with inclusion rather than exclusion, protection rather than neglect, and recognition rather than silence. To ensure the best protection I encourage you to support the development of a legally binding instrument for the human rights of older persons.

Mr. President,

Now, allow me to share some insights from the two country visits I have undertaken since my last report to the Council. Firstly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and sincere appreciation to the Governments of Malaysia and Saudi Arabia for their invitations.

In December 2024, I had the pleasure of undertaking a 12-day country visit to Malaysia. The Government's efforts to quickly adapt to the ongoing demographic shift that will make Malaysia an aged nation by 2030 are commendable. I was pleased to see positive initiatives such as social allowances and free healthcare contributing to the well-being of older persons. However, I was made aware of ongoing challenges throughout the country.

For example, the system for non-contributory social protection allowances for older persons is complex and fragmented, making it difficult to navigate. Furthermore, the traditional system of families providing for older persons should not be used as a pretext to minimize the Government's responsibility in this regard. While I commend the positive initiatives that facilitate older persons' access to employment, especially for vulnerable groups, there is a lack of a specific focus on intersectional discrimination affecting older women, older Indigenous persons, older migrants, older LGBTIQ+ persons or others. Having recognized ageing as a priority, I encourage Malaysia to turn this recognition into rights-based action with a meaningful budget.

In April 2025, I accepted an invitation from the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to undertake a ten-day visit to the country. Throughout my visit, I observed visible efforts to improve the situation of older persons. For instance, there were impressive leaps towards modernization, including a myriad of services for older persons that are difficult to find anywhere else. These include at-home and virtual healthcare and civil registry services, as well as advanced medical services in prison.

However, a rights-based approach requires a focus on those who are in the most vulnerable situations. In the case of Saudi Arabia, non-residents seem to remain largely excluded from public policies for older persons, despite making up a large proportion of the older population. Most importantly, they are excluded from free healthcare and social security benefits. I encourage the Government to extend the protection to be available to all older persons in the country.

I hope that the further findings and recommendations in the two country reports will help both Governments build a better future for older persons. And I can assure you that the mandate is ready for further dialogue and technical assistance.

Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates and attendees,

Let us not waste any more time. Let us affirm together that human rights do not diminish with age. They endure. They are lifelong. They belong to all of us.

I hope to continue engaging positively and constructively with States, building on the foundations that have already been established

As my last words to you in my opening remarks I want to draw your attention to a current situation which impacts us all a mandates of the Special procedures.

I unconditionally denounce the US Government's sanctions on the Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territory. I express my full solidarity with Francesca Albanese. Sanctioning a Special Rapporteur appointed by the Human Rights Council violates international law and is a direct attack on the integrity of the UN human rights system, including special procedures as a whole. I call on all States to act decisively to denounce these sanctions and refuse to carry them out. I also call on the United States to immediately withdraw these illegal sanctions."

I thank you for your attention and your commitment and I am very much looking forward to our interactive dialogue today and I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your attention and support.

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