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UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

International Day of Older Persons
Statement by the UN Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Claudia Mahler

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Marking the International Day of Older persons 2025, the Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of all Human Rights by Older Persons, Claudia Mahler, called for stronger protection of their human rights and recognition of their indispensable role in society, particularly in the context of armed conflicts and peacebuilding, as highlighted in this year's report to the General Assembly.

Older persons are too often left behind during conflicts. Strong connections to their place of origin and fear that if they leave, they may not be able to return, compounded by lack of mobility and lack of access to information, results in older persons often delaying their displacement until the last minute. When they remain, they are not spared by armed forces. They are raped, injured and killed. Aid distribution is frequently announced on social media or other online platforms. As a result, older persons often receive the information too late—if at all—and miss out on assistance. Disrupted healthcare infrastructure and support systems disproportionately affect older persons who are more likely to have chronic illnesses that require ongoing treatment and care – the lack of the medical treatment leads in the worst cases to death. Many face difficulties in accessing refugee camps which lack in adapted infrastructure or institutionalization against their will.

Yet, older persons also demonstrate strength and leadership in post-conflict contexts. They serve as cultural custodians, community leaders, and stabilizing forces. In the aftermath of war and displacement, their lived experiences and historical knowledge are crucial for countering radicalization, preserving cultural identity, and supporting long-term peace initiatives. These contributions are often overlooked, even though they are essential for local communities and driving recovery action.

The International Day of Older Persons 2025 is therefore both a celebration and a call to action. Reflecting this year's theme, "Older Persons Driving Local and Global Action: Our Aspirations, Our Well-Being, and Our Rights," the Independent Expert underscores that aspirations must be grounded in rights, and that the contributions of older persons are central to building resilient, just, and inclusive societies.

This year marks a significant milestone with the adoption of the Open-ended intergovernmental working group for the elaboration of a legally binding instrument on the promotion and protection of the human rights of older persons in the Human Rights Council.

The Independent Expert underlines the urgency of establishing a robust legal framework to safeguard rights, to ensure the protection during armed conflict and emergencies By advancing toward a binding international instrument, the global community can honor the aspirations of older persons, protect their well-being, and guarantee their rights, not only in times of peace but also in the most difficult circumstances of conflict and recovery to overcome the invisibility of older persons.

ENDS

***The expert:** Claudia Mahler, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons (www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-older-persons)*

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