

Thank you, Dr. Bianco, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, and Colleagues:

Older persons have suffered unconscionable atrocities globally during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Deeply-rooted implicit biases are expressed more explicitly as “ageism” against older persons, “mentalism” against persons with mental conditions, and “ableism” against persons with disabilities. This triple jeopardy, powered by the COVID-19 pandemic, has waged a deadly war against older persons, leaving many behind, disregarded, marginalized or culled. Violations of their human rights have skyrocketed, by omission or commission, via discriminatory policies, procedures, theories, programs, laws, and lack of culpability.

Civil society organizations have relentlessly warned governments and policy makers of their countless failures resulting in human rights violations including civic, economic, property and cultural rights, food and water supply, sanitation, employment. Recent perpetrators are digital divide, access to justice, physical and mental health care, disaster relief, humanitarian aid, impact of climate change, and murder of human rights defenders. Civil society's space for participation has been shockingly reduced, and their input principally ignored or treated as an annoyance.

Civil society urgently calls on all governments to focus attention on:

1. The Decade of Healthy Aging as longevity is the defining demographic trend of the 21st. century
2. Waging a war against ageism, a highly malignant, insidious and destructive pandemic affecting one in two persons globally
3. Fully protecting human rights of older persons everywhere by implementing a UN convention
4. Cross-cutting, intersectionality and inclusiveness issues – at the core of SDGs- *affecting persons of all ages, everywhere.*
5. The well articulated 2030 SDG Agenda impacting *people, planet, partnerships, prosperity and peace everywhere*

Recommendations:

1. **Ensuring inclusion of a human rights perspective in implementing the SDGs** incorporating the voices, experiences, and choices of older persons.
2. **Incorporating positive portrayal of older persons.** Some older persons need medical rehabilitation and social welfare, but the vast majority are active, socially connected, and contribute substantially to their families, communities, and the economy.
3. **Establishing procedures and space for inclusion of civil society as overseers, key partners and enablers** in decision-making, legislation, policies and programmes at all levels- national, regional and global, and the UN.
4. **Collecting and utilizing relevant data for SDGs** e.g. an ageism study with 7 million persons showed poor health outcomes in 95.5%, chiefly affecting *mental health*. Ageism's annual health care costs in the US alone is *\$63 billion!*
5. **Actively leading and supporting drafting of a UN convention on the rights of older persons** critical for protecting human rights of older persons, and improving global health and economy.

In Conclusion: What you permit, you promote. Let us not permit the status quo to ensure future generations live free from discrimination and fully enjoy their rights, where no one is left behind, forgotten or excluded.

A sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic requires an inclusive path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and Decade of Healthy Aging.