

Building the Movement for Action on MIPAA

Statement by Susanne Paul, President, Global Action on Aging

As we hear how governments and international organizations have put MIPPA into practice, we see many interesting, creative, useful approaches. However, when we examine the narrow terrain that these initiatives have covered, we know that much more needs to be done—in rural areas, in towns and cities, countries, regions and at the UN. We've heard today how MIPPA's "bottom up" approach invites voluntary and creative activities that have given us impressive examples. But is it enough? Back in 2002, the Madrid document's authors held back from requiring or insisting that governments take specific steps.

In the meantime, the world's aging population grew larger every year. During the past five years older people have protested against cutbacks in benefits and increases in retirement age in the streets of Europe and elsewhere. What many older persons saw as their "human right"—to a pension, for example, has disappeared. The vast political shift the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has left many millions without social support, even the most basic life necessities. In Latin America, older persons have marched out of the mountains and flooded into city streets to demand political changes that address their situation. In the US, caregivers and rescue workers ignored and abandoned many elderly to death by drowning after Hurricane Katrina. All these abuses, if you will, of human rights are provoking new levels of protests and campaigns in many places across the globe.

Global Action on Aging records these stories and developments twice a week, every week, on our website, www.globalaging.org We publish materials in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish—the UN's official languages. Many, many people visit this website regularly.

Our readers, our members and friends and partners believe it is time to organize an Aging Movement that would work to secure a human rights convention on aging.

Why try now? We, as today's older persons, want a stake in defining our future. We want to mobilize around our collective needs---in poor countries, in rich countries. If we can get a convention, then we would have common language to press our governments to adopt national laws and truly protect older persons. With a worldwide movement of older persons and our advocates, every nation would be obliged to adopt the convention.

So let's explore together how all of us could help move this process forward.

We can draw on the lessons of the successful Disability Movement. Broadly democratic, it embraced organizations devoted to deaf, blind, mobility and mental impairment—surely a challenging constituency. The group formed an effective and representative Caucus that devoted its full-time energies to this effort over a period of at least 8 years

We, as older persons, can attract a broad range of older persons and organizations concerned aging to join in: Farmers, shopkeepers, caregivers, social workers, gerontologists, trade union leaders, economists, humanitarian aid workers, intellectual workers, health providers, religious groups, activists, civil rights groups, indigenous people, women's groups, and many more.

We can organize a world wide movement to create a convention that would get support from the UN's Member Countries. We could organize by communities, create coalitions, adopt national positions, or by our jobs---farmers, trade unions, women, doctors, factory workers, sailors. What fun to get to know all these people! We would need to form broad, effective alliances across the trade union movement and with progressive non-governmental organizations that are committed to similar goals and purposes

We must be certain to recognize and affirm the talent and leadership among older persons and our advocates outside North America and Europe. An examination of Aging Movement History reveals the strong leadership that has come from Eva Peron of Argentina, Julia Alvarez of the Dominican Republic and from the UN's aging specialists, Tarek Shuman from Lebanon and Alexander Sidorenko of the Ukraine. And at this Commission we are meeting emerging activists, from Brazil, Chile and Adriana Furlong from Mexico.

Many abuses of older persons' rights confront us every day. Our aging movement must defend older persons right to grow old, with the benefits of adequate income and health care as outlined in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We will have to reject neo-liberal complaints that public services are too expensive. We need--must have-- a movement to fight the destruction of pensions, reduction of their health care, the massive marginalization of old people in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world.

At the same time we must affirm the extraordinary "value" of older persons, such as their care-giving tasks. What better example of caring can be found than the thousands of African Grandmothers who care for many children orphaned by HIV? We must campaign for social pensions to support these heroic and courageous caregivers.

We will have to learn from one another: For example, we must ask: What are the abuses of human rights that you see in your country, or state or town? What does your organization want in an aging human rights document?

I offer you our Global Action on Aging website (www.globalaging.org) as a resource to the ageing movement--- to post the abuses that you see in your locale, to write what you believe must go into an aging convention. What are the human rights we must claim? And here's my prediction: After a long life, older persons everywhere will show more vision, more daring, more demands for justice than ever before! At last, we're entitled!

MIPPA helped us come this far. . .but we have a distance to go. . . let's keep on the journey toward an Ageing Convention.