

Panel “La contribución de la sociedad civil en relación a la Convención y Relator de los Derechos de las personas mayores”

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Buenos días y saludos a todas y todos. Quisiera dar gracias al Gobierno de Chile por la invitación para dirigirme a ustedes.

En 2006 estuve por primera vez en Santiago de Chile, estudiando español. Hoy día, tres años mas tarde, aún soy un estudiante de su idioma; por eso lamentablemente tengo que hacer esta presentación en inglés.

Since this is my first presentation in this series of meetings in follow-up to the Brasilia Declaration, I suspect you are asking yourselves, “¿quién es?, Who is he?”. First, I am one of the representatives of the International Association of Gerontology & Geriatrics (IAGG) to the United Nations (UN) in New York. This is a bit peculiar because I am neither a gerontologist nor a geriatrician –that’s another story-. My work background and formal degree are in public administration. Second, I am the vice-chair of the NGO Committee on Ageing *at* the United Nations in New York. I stress “at” because we are *not* an official committee *of* the United Nations, a mistaken assumption people sometimes make. The Committee on Ageing is composed primarily of representatives of over 50 NGO accredited by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Other persons intersted in ageing can join the Committee on Ageing and attend our monthly public meetings. Third, unlike the others on this panel, I am *not* an expert on the human rights of older persons. I am new to this field; but fortunately for the past 2 years I have had the opportunity to work with and learn from experts you know well: Susanne Paul, of Global Action on Aging, Alex Kalache and Laura Machado of IAGG, Bridget Sleaf of HelpAge International, and Sandra Huenchuan of CEPAL.

In accordance with the charge to this panel I will speak today about the work of the IAGG in support of a Convention and Special Rapporteur. I will focus, in particular, on its participation with 8 other international NGO specializing in ageing in an effort to promote wider public support for a Convention and Rapporteur.

As Laura Machado reported to you at the first follow-up meeting to the Brasilia Declaration in Rio de Janeiro last year, the IAGG is committed to the promotion of the human rights of older persons and to supporting in concert with other international NGO the movement for a UN Convention on the rights of older persons and/or a Special Rapporteur. Every 4 years during its quadrennial world congress the IAGG changes its administration and headquarters. The latest transition occured just 3 months ago in Paris. I can report to you that the new administration of IAGG reaffirms these commitments.

The 9 international NGO that are seeking to coordinate their efforts in this undertaking are:

- Age Concern & Help the Aged,
- The AARP Office of International Affairs,
- Global Action on Aging,
- HelpAge International,
- The International Asociation of Gerontolgy & Geriatrics,
- The International Asociation of Homes & Services for the aged,
- The International Federation on Ageing,
- The International Network for the prevention of elder abuse,
- The International Longevity Centers Global Alliance.

Currently this international NGO “coalition”, if I may call it that, is purely informal. We are not as well organized and structured as, for example, your regional network, “Coordinación de Organismos Regionales de la sociedad civil de América Latina y el Caribe (CORV)”. I was fortunate enough to be able come to Santiago earlier last week to attend the regional meeting on the rights of older persons organized by CORV this past Thursday and Friday. I was greatly impressed by the work of that conference that produced the outcome document presented to the governments at this meeting.

This past July representatives of 5 of the 9 International NGO met during the IAGG congress in Paris. We were most fortunate that Sergei Zelenev, the former Chief of the Social Integration Branch of the UN Department of Economic & Social Affairs (UN DESA) and now the interim director of the UN International Research & Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN INSTRAW), was able to join us and contribute to our discussions. The understandings reached at that meeting were:

1. That in promoting a UN Convention we are embarking on a long-term, multi-year project,
2. That we need a diversity of compelling arguments to overcome resistance to a Convention and to convince the many and diverse publics around the world of the need for a Convention,
3. That there needs to be a skillful, politically sensitive coordination of efforts at all levels: civil society, academia, national governments, intergovernmental bodies, regional organizations or networks, as well as at the United Nations,
4. That we need a member state champion or champions at the UN. We urgently need a new global ambassador for ageing, a new Julia Tavares Alvarez!
5. That our organizations should utilize their web-sites to make available documents relevant to the rights of older persons, and
6. That we develop an advocacy document to help local and national NGO in their lobbying of their national governments. This document, to be no more than 10 pages, translated into as many languages as we are capable of, should cover:
 - What the rights of older people are,
 - Older people rights under current international law,
 - The importance of demographic ageing,
 - Why a convention is needed,
 - What the local and national NGO can do, and
 - A bibliography.

The authors of each section were requested to have a draft prepared for review at the September 3-5 meeting of the World Demographic Association in St Gallen, Switzerland. The international day of older persons, October 1, was targeted for the dissemination of the document.

However, at St Gallen it was recognized that October 1 was too ambitious a target date. We are now aiming to release this advocacy document on December 10, Human Rights day. For IDOP events starting October 1 and continuing through the month, we instead developed the announcement handed out today. Unfortunately, I did not receive the Spanish translation of this announcement until this past Friday afternoon, too late to distribute at the Regional NGO Conference.

Over the next few months this international “coalition” will be addressing both short and long term issues:

In the immediate short term, how and to whom will we disseminate the advocacy document? Frankly, for many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, I see distributing this document there to be, as the expression goes, “carrying coals to newcastle”. You are already educating your populations as to their rights as older persons and the need for a UN Convention and already advocating to your governments. It should be more useful in other regions of the world.

For the longer term, the members of this currently informal “coalition” of International Ageing NGO recognize they must:

1. Explicitly and formally acknowledge they are working together;
2. Establish the goals of the group and prepare and issue corresponding mission and vision statements;
3. Formulate strategies to achieve these goals, recognizing the different strengths and limitations of each member. This, of course, includes the resources of money, personnel, and time that each organization can devote to this undertaking. And
4. Develop a mutually agreed upon structure to oversee and carry out the agreed upon strategies.

I expect these longer term issues will be addressed at meetings during the February 2010 session of the UN Commission for Social Development in New York and the may 2010 Global Conference of the International Federation on Ageing in Melbourne, Australia.

Another forum through which the IAGG is working to advance a Convention and/or Rapporteur is the “Sub-committee to promote a convention on the rights of older persons” of the NGO Committee on Ageing. Juanita Carrillo, IAGG main representative in New York, and I are members of the Sub-committee, which is chaired by our dear Susanne Paul. She will discuss its genesis and work during her presentation.

I will only point out here that the Sub-committee to promote, as we call it, faces much the same organizational and resource issues as the international NGO “coalition”. Also still be discussed by both groups is what they conceive the relationship between the two should be. This discussion probably should not and will not take plan until each more clearly establishes its own mission and goals and available resources.

I conclude my remarks with the obvious observation that the international ageing community is years behind the Latin American and Caribbean region in organizing itself for a global campaign to achieve a un convention on the rights of older persons. Clearly we should examine more closely and learn from what you in this region have accomplished, how you did it, what challenges remain in the region and how you plan to address them. To adapt a CORV motto, ¡unámonos a la causa! Let’s join together in the cause!

Gracias por su atención. Thank you!