



Portfolio sample by Stacy Dry Lara

## The Demographic Revolution – A Victory for Development September 10, 2014

An interesting cluster interactive (CI) dialog on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons was held at HRC27.

The world's population is now older than it has ever been which is causing an unprecedented demographic transformation towards an ageing population. The swing is occurring in all regions of all countries at various levels of development. In May 2014, the Human Rights Council appointed Ms. Rosa Kornfeld-Matte as the first Independent Expert (IE) on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons (HROP). In her first report as IE, Ms. Kornfeld-Matte, said that it is important to note that the ageing population is one of the most influential demographic trends of the 21st century, which has important and far-reaching implications on all aspects of society.

Globally, there are already nearly 700 million people over 60 years, 10% of the world population. By 2050, this percentage will double, reaching 20%, or about 2 billion people. The aging of the population has no borders, it occurs in all regions and in all countries at different levels of development. This process and will affect each of our families and all of us.

Ms. Kornfeld-Matte said that her mandate will be based on three essential elements: inclusion and participation of older people in defense of their dignity, and coordination and cooperation between the different actors.

Acknowledging that her term is new she shared with the General Assembly her considerations of the mandate (and I quote from a French translation):

- The first is to place the elderly at the heart from the perspective of human rights people. The voice of the elderly must be taken into account in the analysis of public policies and the implementation of international instruments and legislation relating to human rights of older persons. Without the inclusion or participation of the elderly, it is difficult to understand their concerns and to review the adequacy of existing legislation with their expectations and needs.
- The second is to defend the dignity of older people in all circumstances. Human dignity is one of the key principles of all human rights and implies respect for older people's life, the integrity of the individual and social inclusion. Elderly people should be treated fairly regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, their economic, social status or political belief.
- The third is to ensure that the mandate is not only an effective space to express and channel the demands of the elderly, but also a space for accommodating the different contributions from Member States, civil society and other interested parties in order to successfully bring the various stakeholders working on the issue parties. This merger will give more visibility to best practices while considering the characteristics of each region, each country and community.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) seven of the 15 countries with more than 10 million older people are in the developing world. By 2050, another 15 countries currently classified as 'developing' are expected to have 10 million or more older people. This generation is growing at a faster

rate than the total population in almost all regions of the world. As a consequence, of this extreme demographic shift, millions of older persons face unequal treatment, isolation, chronic poverty, unemployment, violence and abuse, limited access to justice and lack of social and political mechanisms to ensure their participation. The Sierra Leone delegate added to this context saying, “aging, however, is not synonymous with disability and the human rights challenges faced by older persons are not necessarily related to disability or health problems. Indeed, with the availability of better health services, many persons over 60 are still physically and mentally fit and should not be excluded from active life.”

Ms. Kornfeld-Matte explained that her work will include two phases:

The first will consist of research and detailed analysis of information provided by States and other stakeholders regarding the implementation of the human rights of older persons. The second will include the identification of best practices and gaps in the implementation of existing legislation. The objective is to present at the end of the three years for which the mandate was established a comprehensive report with recommendations for the implementation of possible measures to ensure the emergence of an open society for all generations.

The European Union commended Ms. Kornfeld-Matte for her focus on the implementation of the law existing in this area. They stress that, as demonstrated last year during the 2<sup>nd</sup> global review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, which remains THE point of reference on this issue the progress on the implementation side has been limited.

In 2002, the Second World Assembly on Ageing acknowledged, for the first time in history, aging as an issue of overall development and economic policy and not simply one of social security and welfare. Responding to the rising concern over the speed and scale of global aging, the UN General Assembly adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing meant to guide Governments, the UN and civil society through the opportunities and challenges of population ageing in the twenty-first century.

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing requires States to take measures to address ageing in order to achieve a society for all ages. It also calls for the mainstreaming of ageing into national and global development agendas, and contains recommendations for action focused on three priority areas, namely development, health and well-being, and enabling and supportive environments, which are divided into specific issues, objectives and actions. The Plan stresses the opportunity for older persons to contribute to development, with older persons embraced as a resource, rather than in need of care and support. Its overall objective is to create a society for all in which ‘persons everywhere are able to age with security and dignity and to continue to participate in their societies as citizens with full rights’.

*Thanks for reading – until the next blog Stacy Lara.*

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