

**International Longevity Centre of Canada**  
**Online Workshop to the UNECE MIPAA/RIS Review – April 21, 2021**  
**Making Participation Meaningful: Bringing Governments and Civil Society Together**

Thank you for this opportunity to address the need for “meaningful participation” with Civil Society.

The fact that Civil Society is here today, illustrates that the UNECE is listening, and I believe that is reflective of the Member States commitment to hear from those of us working to improve the lives of older persons.

And I must say that as Civil Society I had a very positive experience with the UNECE Working Group on Aging in the development of the recent Guidelines for Mainstreaming Aging project.

In that case all the elements were present for a meaningful contribution, Member States and a UN Team who were open to the voices of older people, a plan that ensured Civil Society involvement in all the meeting on the project and direct involvement of Civil Society in the construction and writing of the Guidelines from the beginning until the end.

It also provided an opportunity for my organization to work with the Canadian government which I believe contributed to enhancing our relationship.

**What are the benefits of an CSO involvement in policy/programming?**

One of the key advantages of a strong Civil Society voice on any issue, is that it can bring new information to decision makers, in a voice that reflects close contact with or active participation of the older populations in our respective countries. It is the vital “nothing about us without us.

Getting the message out on what the Government does well as well as being critical of areas requiring change are necessary elements of a productive, healthy society and all sides need to be open to the lived experiences of the recipients of policies and programs of Member States.

Although that doesn’t always make your lives easy, it makes our society more just.

I’m going to outline here some of the work that ILC Canada had done to engage with our government to ensure meaningful participation at home and at the United Nations and then I will also briefly discuss MIPAA.

**Enabling Factors and Resulting Actions**

I must admit that as a Canadian Civil Society Organization we have a very open and clean line into our government who have consistently worked to involve Civil Society on issues that affect their lives.

I also want to say here that this is a two way street, for while it is important for governments to reach out to Civil Society it also important for Civil Society to reach out to Government both at the political and bureaucratic level. And that is certainly what we have done in ILC Canada.

This works best when there is a level of trust on both parties and the ability of Civil Society to speak truth to power without fear of retribution and for Governments to be able to discuss policy options with the understanding by Civil Society that a discussion does not necessarily mean policy implementation.

So ILC Canada has reached out to our Ambassadors both at the UN Headquarters in New York and in Geneva.

We have involved them in our events at the UN such as the recent side event at the Open Ended Working Group Aging and have provided our support to work underway in Geneva for the next Human Rights Council meeting where we hope to shine a brighter light on the human rights issues facing older people.

We have met with Ministers responsible for older people advocating for older people to be included in policy and programming. We have spoken at parliamentary committees on the rights of older women and impact of COVID-19 on the human rights of older people.

We have undertaken write-in campaigns and brought a call for the Convention of the Rights of Older Persons by 50 of the largest Civil Society Organizations on aging and most of the health organizations in the country, resulting in a response from Canada to look at the merits of a Convention.

We have also been active in engaging the Canadian public in our advocacy, particularly during the pandemic. Using traditional media, social media and webinars to build support for our work and to engage more deeply with other Civil Society Organizations and to encourage that they connect to Government.

## **Barriers**

In a year when older persons were devastated by the pandemic, where we saw clear violations of human rights across the globe, one would expect a more robust response from Governments than what we have seen globally.

Civil Society has witnessed a tone deafness in the response which one would not expect, particularly from developed countries, who have the resources to take action.

It is hard not to see the inherent ageism in issues like the lack of quorum at the beginning and end of the recent Open Ended Working Group on Aging and the lack of any real outcome from the meeting. I must say that Canada was in the meeting the whole time.

I can tell you one outcome is that the Civil Society is energized to call out this behaviour and our commitment to work for a United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons has been solidified. So thanks to the Missing Member States for that.

Also, there is an absence of older persons voices at key UN organizations and meetings such as the Commission on Status of Women, the High Level Political Forum (Sustainable Development Goals) and the Human Rights Council. Governments could help us by recognizing we are part of all aspects of Society and need to be a part of these important discussions.

### **A Few Words on Moving Forward**

For this cycle of MIPAA, the Canadian government has sent out a questionnaire to Civil Society and has invited Civil Society to provide comments on the 4<sup>th</sup> Report including the opportunity for one on one conversations with Civil Society which will enhance this discussion.

We would respectfully suggest perhaps reaching a bit further out, such as hosting a town hall or round table so that Civil Society to talk to each other and the various levels of government. I thought Jemma's policy Group approach sounded very inclusive and thorough.

This could help address the fact that with a federated state it is often difficult to cover cross-jurisdictional issues and provide an opportunity to engage difficult to reach populations including those in care homes, rural residents, multi-cultural older people and Indigenous Elders.

With regard to MIPAA the main constraint is that it is a plan and does not have impact of a legally binding instrument such as a Convention.

So yes planning is great, but it clearly does not have the same impact as a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons and this last year proved that we need to both planning framework such as MIPAA and the legal tools to ensure older people have the same rights as all others.

Thank you