United Nations International Day of Older Persons (UNIDOP) 2023

"Climate change induced disasters: Older persons' preparedness and response to build forward better"

28 September 2023, 15:30-17:00 CEST

Hybrid in-person & WebEx event, United Nations, Geneva

The intersection of population ageing and climate change, two global challenges that are rapidly evolving and growing ever more complex, requires immediate attention and concerted action. Climate change induced disasters affect everyone. Older persons, however, experience the effects of climate disasters the most. This is especially true for older persons who are women, who live in poverty, who live with health conditions and/or disabilities, and who live on island states and low, coastal areas where land and livelihoods are under immediate threat because of climate change and rising sea levels. Even though older persons are disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis, they are seldom consulted or included in future climate action plans.

According to A/HRC/47/46, climate change impacts an older person's "rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation, housing, decent work, culture, and development". [(1)] Tangible actions and consultation are required to guarantee these rights. It is therefore essential to consider instruments, policies, and strategies that effectively address the challenges posed by climate change on older persons. Climate change action is the responsibility of everyone, including local, national, and international institutions. Through collaboration across sectors, parliaments, governments, the private sector, and all decision-makers and stakeholders can ensure the development of comprehensive and inclusive actions that prioritize the well-being and rights of older individuals while promoting sustainable environmental practices.

Equally important in climate change activism is listening to and hearing the voice of older people themselves. Because of a lifetime of experience and acquired knowledge across the lifespan, older persons understand the magnitude and potential negative impact of climate change induced disasters. Coupled with youth led activism, intergenerational partnerships can help mobilize successful environmental actions.

The objective of this event is two-fold. First, to advocate for the promotion, protection, and effective access to the human rights of older persons when preparing for and responding to climate-induced disasters. Recognizing that older individuals can be particularly vulnerable in such circumstances, it is paramount to ensure that their rights, dignity, and well-being are upheld throughout all stages of disaster management. Second, it is imperative to give older persons a voice and opportunity for active participation in the disaster management process and to promote intergenerational climate activism. By emphasizing the importance of inclusive and rights-based approaches, this event aims to foster a collective commitment to safeguarding the fundamental rights of older persons in the face of climate challenges. Aligning with the United Nations Human Rights 75 Initiative, "together, let's rejuvenate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, demonstrate how it can meet the needs of our time AND advance its promise of freedom, equity and justice for all" [(2)].

(1) OHCHR (2021, April 20). A/HRC/47/46: Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of older persons in the context of climate change. Retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc4746-analytical-study-promotion-and-protection-rights-older-persons-context
(2) OHCHR (2023). Human Rights 75 Initiative. Retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-older-persons/climate-resilience-and-older-refugees