



**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ELDER ABUSE OF  
THE NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING**

*PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL PANEL DISCUSSION ON*

***AGEISM IN THE WORKPLACE***

*June 4, 2009*

The Program featured panelists representing social, legal, legislative and research perspectives on ageism as it relates to older adults employment protection and workplace discrimination. Presenters represented both non-government organizations (NGOs) recognized with consultative status by the United Nations and United Nations affiliated divisions, and included internationally recognized experts and developing scholars in the fields of gerontology and geriatrics, workforce legislation, and elder abuse. The purpose of this panel was to contribute to the goal of

**“Building a Society for All Ages”**

**Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid 2002**



## **PROGRAM**

*“Ageism in the Workplace”*

*AN INTERNATIONAL PANEL DISCUSSION*

**Introduction: Margot Nadien, PhD**  
Co-Chair  
Sub-Committee on Elder Abuse  
NGO Committee on Ageing

**Co-Moderator: Susan B. Somers, JD**  
Secretary General  
International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse

**Panelists: Robert N. Butler, MD**, President and Chief Executive Officer  
And Chair of the Alliance for Health and the Future of the  
International Longevity Center – USA, and professor of geriatrics  
at the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Adult Development  
at the Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City (Keynote)

**Elena Gastaldo, Program Officer**, International Labour  
Organisation/New York

**Eliyanna Kaiser, Chief of Staff to Mikah Z. Kellner**, New York State  
Assembly Member, 65<sup>th</sup> District, New York City ((Presentation given by  
Patricia Brownell, PhD, Co-chair, Sub-Committee on Elder Abuse, NGO  
Committee on Ageing)

**Mebane Powell, MSW**, Fordham University Graduate School of Social  
Service, Doctoral Program

Sponsored by the  
*Sub-Committee on Elder Abuse*  
*The NGO Committee on Ageing*

Held 4 June 2009, 1:00 – 3:00 PM  
777 Church Center of the UN, 44<sup>th</sup> Street and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue

## NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING PROGRAM: AGEISM IN THE WORKPLACE

UN Church Center – June 4, 2009

Introduction: Dr. Margot Nadien

*This program celebrates productive ageing by fostering understanding of ageism in the workplace as a form of older adult employee mistreatment, and discussing organizational and legal remedies from both international and local perspectives. The theme is linked with an important date, June 15<sup>th</sup>, which is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD).*

As Dr. Robert Butler mentioned in 2008, “Aging is a form of systemic stereotyping and discrimination against people simply because they are old.” People are living longer and healthier lives and are continuing to make contributions, both in paid employment and civic engagement, long after they turn sixty years of age. Elder abuse is thought to occur only behind closed doors with care dependent victims, but mistreatment of older persons is not often recognized as abuse when it occurs in the workplace.

The June 4, 2009, program highlights older persons as active and productive contributors to society, and seeks to raise awareness of the challenges in combating age discrimination and adult employment mistreatment in the workplace. Organizational and legal remedies from both international and local perspectives are also presented. The program includes a keynote address by Dr. Robert Butler, followed by presentations by Elena Gestaldo, Eliyanna Kaiser (provided by Patricia Brownell) and Mebane Powell.

Dr. Butler is a renowned and very influential figure in the field of aging and a person who wears several hats. He is a physician, a psychiatrist, a gerontologist and a public servant. He is well known as the President and CEO of The International Longevity Center in the United States. Moreover, in 1975 he became the founding director of the National Institute on Aging within the National Institutes of Health. In 1982 he established the Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City, the first department of geriatrics in a U.S. medical center. He is also the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Why Survive?*, and also the recently published book *Longevity Revolution: the Benefits and Challenges of Living a Long Life*.

*Dr. Robert Butler*  
*International Longevity Center USA*

I am always privileged to speak here before the UN NGO Committee on Aging. In fact, I have long harbored the belief that we really need a worldwide resurgence of movements on the behalf of non-governmental organizations. I don't know why we should just depend upon these officials within the UN when there's so much energy, drive and much political capital within and among all of you. I can't think of a more painful subject than that which we are addressing today, the question of abuse. The abuse of women, older women in the world, is probably the most shocking of all events. And I'm not just talking about physical abuse, financial abuse and emotional abuse, but even sexual abuse. It's really quite terrifying to think through the implications of what happens to women throughout the world. And of course we see even those in the world who can be exploited, as we know from our own case here in New York, our very distinguished figure Mrs. Brooke Astor.

So I have to go back because I have been asked to provide a context for the focus on this topic. Ageism and age discrimination do not just occur, of course, in the workplace, although that is where I'm going to focus most of my attention. It appears in so many ways in our own country. It's still to me absolutely shocking to say. But only one of ten American older adults actually meets basic federal standards in respect to economic security. Although representing 12% of the population, 40% of all the drug utilization in America is by people over 65. That's why we get into problems with medications like Vioxx (Rubin, 2004), because there are no requirements by our Food and Drug Administration to include older people in clinical trials. The language we use, the media, the television, newspapers, and in so many different places do not present older people as positive forces. They are a burden. They are costly. They are a problem. That's not at all accurate.

So let me just now say a few words about older people in the workplace. As you know, last year we celebrated the wonderful Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The truth is older persons were not included as a protected class in 1948. Nor were they included as a protected class within our own Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, then United States President Lyndon Johnson made up for it to a degree, because he then asked Willard Wirtz, who was then the Secretary of Labor, to undertake a study of employment of older people. The report was important and appropriate, and stimulated the development of the Age Discrimination Employment Act (Macnicol, 2006; Gregory, 2001), for which enforcement is the responsibility of the Employment Equal Opportunities Commission. It is not so well enforced actually, but at least presumably so. It did become an important step forward.

Subsequently, under the leadership of Congressman and Chair, House of Representatives Aging Committee, Claude Pepper, in 1986 mandatory retirement in America was virtually ended. However, as you know with our present economic downfall we've seen a resurgence of age discrimination. It's a lot harder for older persons, defined as workers

age 40 and above by our statute, to get jobs and it takes them longer to get another job. So we still have a very real problem.

A number of us, including a number of you, have been laboring to try to develop a Declaration of Human Rights of Older Persons in the United Nations. At the International Longevity Center (ILC), we've had the occasion to work with the Yale University School of Law, which has a human rights clinic named after Allard Lowenstein. This clinic has helped us at the ILC to build a substantial, creative and thoughtful document. We don't want any ownership of this document: We'd like everybody to own it and to feel they could revise it. We just want to see it to be adopted by the United Nations, as part of our general message about human rights and against ageism throughout the world. And we know too that a Declaration, while it might be a beautiful body of words and language, isn't a UN Convention (international treaty). It doesn't provide a legal footing that we really need, and we know that it can take at least ten years to get a Convention. Of course I have to say sadly that the United States does not have a strong record on ratifying UN Conventions. For example, there are only two nations among about 190 that have not supported a convention on the rights of children, the United States and Somalia. The ILC tried during the last administration to get support from our own government, with respect to human rights of older persons. We were not successful then, but I'm hoping we may do better now. It would be a great step forward, although not the only step that we're going to have to take.

We must also recognize some organizations that are trying to be helpful. The AARP has a strong legal division that has been addressing the issue of age discrimination in the workplace in our country. People like Laurie McCraw has drawn attention to age discrimination in business and non-profit organizations. We heard this morning up at the ILC the presentation by law professor Sarah Ricks, which has to do with the whole contemporary nature of the situation for older workers in our country. We have clearly a lot to do.

I just want to emphasize a few more points.

We need, in the development of our new Social Security Administration, leadership to really address the issue that has to do with how you evaluate disability. The waiting list is often exhaustive, and people often wait for months before they get any kind of hearing. Social Security Disability Law is not an easy act to deal with. Many people question the disability bill. They want to be in the mainstream and part of the workforce in their own way. However, how do we distinguish between the total inability to work and the ability to work within one's own past occupational content and context? How can we find jobs for people regardless of what disabilities they may experience?

It's quite interesting that the Social Security issue, as it was addressed in the last Presidential campaign, did not really deal with the prospect of continuing work. It was almost like it's the new third rail, that is, within Social Security itself. For example, the President I think quite correctly observed that it would be very simple to lift the lid on the wage base of Social Security. It only affects those of us who are fortunate to earn more

than approximately \$100,000 salary a year. It's not a large amount of money, but it solves about 60% of the solvency shortfall with regard to Social Security. But we also should be working longer, and this is something that the President and Vice President do not seem to want to deal with.

Although we know from studies we did way back in the 1960's that by working longer people live longer and better, it seems somehow disturbing, the idea that people should work longer. It's so important to be a contributing member of our society. For these reasons we should try to encourage this. In 1979, two politicians, Richard Gephardt and David Stockman, held congressional hearings of which I was a part. We brought in social security actuaries to calculate if people stay in the workforce, even just months or a year longer what it would mean. The consequences were enormous. Just staying in for a year practically solves the whole social security shortfall problem.

Now, on average people retire at age 62. Surely they can work until age 63 or longer. That would be in the long run advantageous. It also would tell an important story, that older people are constructive and useful. They are able to continue to make contributions to our society. If we can't do it for pay we should really be doing it as you all do as members of this committee, on a non-paid level and contribute enormously and continuously to our society. So I hope I've set a little bit of the context: the context being that there have been efforts to move toward in trying to address ageism and age discrimination in the workplace. We clearly have a long way to go, both in this country and abroad. In particular, the extreme and savage abuse of people, older people, especially women, simply has to end in this world.

*Elena Gestaldo*  
*International Labour Organization – New York*

Thank you to the NGO Committee on Aging for inviting the ILO today to come and share a little bit of what the International Labour Organization (ILO) is doing for older workers. The ILO is celebrating its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, which makes this a very special occasion for me to speak to you today. I would like to start by reading just two lines of the book we are going to present today (Rodgers, Lee, Swepston & Van Daele, 2009). "The ILO has recognized workplace building in the broader context of violence at work."

The ILO, within the United Nations, is the only tripartite United Nations agency that brings together representatives of governments, employers and workers to jointly shape policies and programs. This means that within the ILO, all of the decisions have to be made in agreement between the government, employers and workers. As yet a clear straightforward definition of violence at work has not been approved, because it is a really, really long process. We are starting to work toward it and as the book states, in the workplace it should be recognized as one of the forms of violence at work.

Older women workers are even more exposed to be victims of different kinds of discrimination. Now, what is the ILO doing in terms of aging population and older workers? The ILO collaborates internationally on workplace standards. It also works collaboratively with governments, employers and workers both to develop international standards, and to develop national legislation and policies to address different issues related to the world of work. It provides technical support to its constituents, government employers and workers, and it conducts studies and research on labor related issues.

When we talk about older people at work, including older workers, the ILO has identified the attitudes of people as one of the main obstacles to older people having a happy working life. What are these obstacles? What are these stereotypes? First of all there is the idea that older workers are less productive. They are more expensive. They are slower to learn and their physical capacity is in decline. Now the problem is that even accepting that when a person grows old there might be changes in the lifestyle, in the needs, in attitudes, in their approaches toward work, nonetheless there is a contribution that has to be recognized. The problem is that this gap (between reality and perceptions or attitudes) is not being filled yet in a proper manner. So the stereotypes remain unaddressed and untackled.

The ILO works with UN Conventions, which are binding instruments in that when states that are members of the ILO ratify an ILO convention, they have to comply with the terms of this Convention. The problem is that there is no Convention specifically related to older workers. The only instrument we have is a Recommendation, which does not have the same legal power of a Convention. The Recommendation on older workers that came out of the international conference in 1980 addresses equal opportunity and treatment for older workers, access to vocational training on an equal basis, access to paid educational leave, access to promotion, and measures to encourage a gradual transition from work to retirement.

The ILO has another instrument that addresses discrimination at work: Convention 111 (ILO, 1958). The problem is that when the Convention in 1958 was passed by those initial labor cultures, it did not include aging as one of the grounds for discrimination. Now the ILO is working with its constituents so that when they are in the process of either reviewing a law or passing new policies in terms of discrimination at the workplace, they include aging as one of the bases of discrimination. As of today, there are about 35 countries that have already included aging as one of the grounds for discrimination. The first countries that included aging were the northern European countries and then slowly it began moving within the European Union and beyond.

The key actor that can play a role in giving older workers the status they deserve within the private sector is the private sector itself. What is being done until now is that the private sector has developed push factors (Lee, 1966), rather than solutions, for an appropriate integration of older workers in the workplace. These push factors can be negative and positive. The negative ones unfortunately are used more than the positive ones. One negative push factor is corporate restructuring, basically laying off older people or using the downsizing of the enterprise or the lack of money as an excuse to lay

off older workers. I think the only positive push factor is use of early retirement packages with compensation.

Governments sometimes support these kinds of policies because through these, governments increase available jobs for young people. This is one of the reasons why government can support these kinds of packages. On the other hand, trade unions in many cases do not oppose these kinds of policies for basically three reasons. First, they can negotiate better conditions for retirement for their members. Second, they consider it a benefit for workers to have a longer retirement even if they can only play golf for a certain amount of years. Third, they assume this will improve the financial soundness of pension schemes. These are some reasons why there is not a strong driving force in one direction or in another.

On the other hand, studies that the ILO and other organizations have carried out confirm that older workers are valuable resources. First of all, older workers can play a mentoring role for younger workers. Second of all older workers have the institutional memory. Third, older workers are less likely to move from one workplace to another. For an enterprise, older workers can be more reliable because they tend to stay where they are as long as they experience good working conditions.

In conclusion, a few recommendations have been identified that can summarize the work the ILO is currently doing on older workers. They are: 1) companies should assure adequate training for their older workers and adapt work environments to their particular needs; 2) provide flexible working arrangements and initiate team work, a positive action for older workers. This can both accommodate the needs of older workers, and benefit for younger workers as well, by enabling them to learn from the experience of those who have experience doing the same job before; 3) governments should provide incentives and terms by which enterprises can maintain older workers; and 4) carefully designed retirement systems should be devised, which also allow employees to work part-time without losing their pension entitlement.

This is also a problem that women face more than men, because women during their working career often have a break or an interruption because of responsibility for family care needs; they are also most likely to work part-time for periods of time. This is an important point and retirement systems should take into consideration that the rights to pension entitlement should not be cut because of this. It is also related to the same part-time workers who have difficult working conditions or those with long contribution periods who should not be excluded from the benefits of retiring earlier. This summarizes the work that the ILO is currently doing.



*Eliyanna Kaiser*  
*Office of Mikah Z. Kellner, New York State Assembly Member, 65<sup>th</sup> District, New York City*

*Dr. Pat Brownell Presenting on Behalf of Eliyanna Kaiser*

I am presenting for Eliyanna Keiser, who was unable to attend the program. She is the Chief of Staff to New York State Assemblyman Kellner, Assemblyman of the 65<sup>th</sup> District on the upper east side of Manhattan. Assemblyman Kellner is co-sponsor of a bill on abuse in the workplace (A06207).

One of the many contributions that Dr. Butler made is naming ageism. He is the first person who identified ageism as an issue of social concern. In chapter four of his book, *Ageism: another Form of Bigotry*, Dr. Butler discusses ageism, including discrimination and ageism in the workplace. In promoting recognition of a social issue as a social problem, as we have learned from the domestic violence movement, it is important to name it, frame it, and explain it. Dr. Butler must be thanked for that in the field of gerontology. Ageism, or abuse of older people in the workplace, was such a new concept in the 1960's that no one, with the exception of Dr. Butler, had actually named or framed, much less explained it as a social phenomenon.

Assemblyman Kellner's bill, "A Labor Law in Relation to the Prevention of Abusive Conduct in the Workplace", even though it's not specific to older people, does have implications for addressing mistreatment of older people in the workplace. This New York State Assembly bill (A06207) establishes the unlawful act of abusive conduct in the workplace, provides remedies and defenses, and imposes vicarious liability on an employer who when made aware of such abuse does not take steps to remedy it. If one can think about ageism as a term that includes mistreatment of older people, and a culture that can precipitate this, being able to identify abuse in the workplace is also part of a remedy. The liability would be for the employer who upon being made aware of such abuse fails to make a good faith effort to correct it. This is an example of a policy that can be legislated to lead to positive changes in the workplace to address ageism.

The purpose of the bill so-sponsored by Assemblyman Kellner is to amend New York State labor law by providing more precise definitions of workplace abuse, providing some employer protections, and preventing a possible explosion of frivolous lawsuits that might be filed due to state agency involvement. The summary of the specific provisions includes amending the New York State labor law by adding a new article 20d, prevention of abusive conduct in the workplace statement of public policy; establishing definitions; and establishing abusive conduct as an unlawful act.

In justification for the proposed law, studies have shown that one out of every six persons has experienced workplace bullying and that approximately 80% are women, as Dr. Butler has noted. Prolonged psychological harassment has no place in the work environment. Prolonged workplace harassment has a negative impact on both the individuals targeted and their families. In the worst cases this type of harassment leads to

physical violence and suicide. Similar legislation has been passed in several other countries including Great Britain, France, Canada and Australia and bills are currently being introduced in twelve states.

*Mebane Powell, MSW  
Fordham University Doctoral Student and Research Associate, New York city  
Department for the Aging*

I am delighted to be here today and honored to be among so many prominent scholars, professionals and advocates in the field of aging. I want to share with you a quote that I believe is very timely to today's discussion. The quote is as follows, "Social ethics and political forces are intimately tied together, especially in terms of which social problems to address, how to address them, and whether or not the disproportionate risk certain groups face is of paramount concern in the world of program implementation and practice." (Meenaghan, Kilty, McNutt, 2004, p. ix). I feel that our speakers today have certainly talked about the rise of ageism and abuse of older adults in the workplace as a social issue of broad public concern, and they have made clear that there is hope on the horizon for policy formation.

There is increasing recognition that bullying, as well as ageism, is occurring in the workplace. We are attempting to address these troubling social problems through social policies, but as they are currently, they remain separate: ageism and abuse. Bringing these two together is really in our hands. As scholars, practitioners and advocates and students, we all have a responsibility to be aware for the creation of policy that includes workplace education, organizational behavior, and the interplay between the individual and the organizational environment.

Research should not happen in a vacuum. All professions should work together, psychologists, social workers, economists, public health professionals, and we all must play a part. I feel we are at a time where the coming together of professions is of the utmost importance in order to answer the question: What are the next logical and most productive steps research can take to provide outcomes and input in to policy implementation and practice?

That being said, I would like to share with you a few thoughts to consider as we move forward. Based on existing research on psychological abuse in the workplace, two key issues need to be addressed in the field of research practice and policy. The first, as we have discussed, is a strong working definition of bullying, which would help employers develop policies, rules and regulations. Second, in order to provide an effective strategy for combating ageism and abuse we must also include education that combats the stereotypes we've talked about, conflict resolution mechanisms, and a commitment from employers that is based on good business practice.

Other issues include the need for a clear and concise definition of abuse in the workplace in order for researchers as well as organizations to address the problem of ageism and

abuse in the workplace and measure the impact of policy implementation within their own organization, as well as outcomes. Other questions for consideration include:

- What types of abuse are occurring in the workplace and how are the workers in the workplace defining abuse?
- Is there consistency in the terms of types of frequency of abuse across industries?
- How do we as researchers and policy makers, as well as organizations, measure the abuse within our workplace?
- Are there certain organizational structures that promote or prevent abuse and ageism from occurring, or is it the culture of the organization that plays a larger role and is the key to prevention and/or promotion of abuse and ageism?
- Have prior discrimination policies that are currently implemented been evaluated regarding the ability to implement them successfully within organizations?
- What were the challenges to implementing these policies?
- How can we use this information to increase the probable success of implementing policies regarding ageism and abuse in the workplace?

In conclusion, I would like to remind everyone that the Madrid 2002 International Plan of Action on Aging does address the rights of older people to serve as productive citizens and have their skills and abilities recognized and appreciated. A Convention on the Human Rights of Older Persons must include language related to the rights of older people to engage in productive work without discrimination and elder abuse. I urge everyone who is investigating, talking, or advocating for this issue about ageism and abuse in the workplace to use the international human rights frame to guide us in future policy practice and research. (Note: for more on abuse and ageism in the workplace, go to <http://blog.imagineage.com/abuse-and-ageism-in-the-workplace/>).

### **Audience Discussion**

*#1 First, I would like to make a comment. It is really ironic that we're talking about ageism in the workplace in the shadow and the part of the UN. I don't know how many people who are aware that the UN has mandatory retirement policies based on age 60 and 62 depending on when people were hired. As long ago as 1997, I heard Ambassador Alvarez was railing about this at one of our International Day of Older Persons events. The most that happened at that time was that the UN raised the mandatory retirement age from 60 to 62. So that's just one thing that we might want to think about in thinking about ageism in the workplace, and being supportive of any action on the part of our colleagues in the UN staff who will actually be departing. As Mebane mentioned, the guiding principle for us is Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging, which has a*

*very long chapter on ageism and opportunities for employment for older persons retraining and so on. I want to add that the follow up documents in the various regions also stress employment opportunities for older persons. Now my question is addressed to Elena. I just want to comment that in 1999 when we were in the midst of an International Year of Older Persons, and by the way this is our tenth anniversary, the ILO was one of the very few units of the UN that really paid attention to older people. I remember a landmark panel of people who came from various parts of the world sponsored by the ILO in Geneva, but held here in New York on older women in the workplace. It really appeared to me, and I think too many others, that it was a landmark opportunity and we very much appreciated that. My question is: In the recent work protocol of the ILO I don't know that older persons are particularly targeted. This work protocol talks about all workers. Is there some way in which older people can benefit and do benefit from what that protocol asks people to do, in looking at the work environment of all workers? I think that's something we have to look at, because where ageism occurs it would probably be in how those protocols are implemented. The UN has a wonderful program for multinational corporations, called The Global Compact. I don't know how many people are aware of that and what it means. Briefly, it means that multinationals when they go into different countries are asked to sign on to the Decent Work Protocols, and to use people within those countries for employment rather than bringing people in from outside. Does the ILO monitor The Global Compact recent work protocols? If so, can they begin to look at how older workers, who are valuable, loyal, and stable, are managed in that way?*

Elena Gestaldo: First let me answer to the second question. To my knowledge the ILO is not monitoring The Global Compact, because it is not only an ILO initiative. It is a UN initiative of which the ILO is part. So there might be a recommendation, but the Global Compact also looks at this issue in a more specific way. In terms of the decent work protocol, decent work is the goal of the ILO in the Decent Work Agenda (<http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/lang-en/index.htm>). This strategy looks at four different aspects of the productive working life of a person that goes from school to after retirement. It's a lifelong approach. It looks at four components of rights.

Here older workers are included as part of the promotion and protection of workers rights, not only when they are actively involved in the labor market but before. First the child labor issue is addressed. The second one is employment. This is addressed to the creation of productive employment, so it's related to the active part of the working life. The third one is social protection in social security. Here there is a focused attention to older workers. The fourth one promotes the right to social dialogue and freedom of association. This is why the role of the social partners, employers, workers and government (in reverse order, government, workers and employers) is so important; otherwise governments get sensitive. They need to be first. This is basically how aging population and older workers fit into the decent work agenda.

*#2 Are there countries or corporations here in the United States that are outstanding in their treatment of older persons in a positive way?*

Jessica Frank: AARP has a program where we give an award to the top ten companies that create a decent workplace for older workers and encourage people to work beyond retirement. Each year in the Fall AARP has a selection process to identify the top age-friendly companies, and these companies are recognized. This has been going on for several years. The applications are growing each year, so there are companies who are interested in creating age-friendly workplaces and attracting older workers. As of two years ago the award program has become international. AARP is looking at multinational corporations and companies in other countries that are promoting age friendly work environments. AARP is trying to encourage more companies to look at what it takes to create a workplace where people can work longer and companies that are putting policies into place that allow people to work longer. This initiative will grow and more companies will apply for this award, so that in the end there will be more and more companies that set standards for older workers.

Elena Gestaldo: There are many examples. One is from Greece. A company decided to implement a retraining program for older workers. Older workers can participate in all training programs offered by the company. The older worker's experience is valued by management. Older workers are frequently involved in providing on-the-job training. Workers with particular skills may remain with the organization past the normal age of retirement. Another example is a retaining program for production workers age over 40 that were put into place by a company in Holland. These are examples of good practices in this area.

*#3 In terms of local activity in New York City, there is an organization called ReServe. Its objective is to collect people who are willing to go back to work and give them stipend, and also collecting employers who are willing to do this. The numbers on either side are growing, and there have been efficacy and satisfaction surveys done for the workforce and employers who utilize ReServe workers. It is a very healthy sign that older retired workers have been encouraged to continue to utilize their expertise until a high level of national awareness is reached.*

*#4 The Japanese have developed a silver Resource program. Are there other examples, particularly in Eastern countries?*

Dr. Robert Butler: The Japanese Silver Human Resource Centers represent a very important older worker employment model to provide opportunities for continuing contributions of older workers. The concept seems to work, as the program is still in operation (Bass & Masato, 1995).

*#5 It is my understanding that the U.S. social security problem has emerged as a result of our government taking funds out of the program and using them for other budget issues. Therefore the social security problem would not have emerged if the government had not borrowed that money?*

Dr. Robert Butler: This is not true. Just like any treasury bill that you have, it's backed by the true faith of government, so that is actually inaccurate.

*#6 How do you respond to people who don't want to work longer because their work life has not been very satisfactory? They have had no vacations. They've worked long hours and look forward to being able to retire. Also is it still true that people of color don't live long enough to collect social security.*

Dr. Robert Butler: The latter is certainly true in general, unfortunately. It is very painful that in general members of minority groups in America do not enjoy the same life expectancy as majority group members. In fact, an African American in Harlem or Baltimore has a lower average life expectancy than a person in Bangladesh. This is really amazing. In a more general sense, our country as a whole has fallen from 11<sup>th</sup> place in life expectancy to 42<sup>nd</sup> place in life expectancy. I hope we will soon undo that with national health insurance. (Answer to first part of the question) That's why we have the option for workers to choose to begin collecting social security retirement benefits at the age of 62, understanding that monthly benefits levels will be lower than if they are collected beginning at a later retirement age. There are many workers who have had very hard jobs working in factories, mines, cotton fields, and other dangerous, abusive and tough jobs. Part of the original concept for social security regards some opportunity for those people. And of course our disability insurance program should be operative too, because some of them because of the hard labor and work they've engaged in have become too disabled to work at a younger age.

*#7 Some of the studies on workplace abuse and bullying of younger employees, particularly women, have suggested that this can be extremely traumatizing even after the victim has left the workplace. There have also been some studies that suggest that older people are more resilient in the face of traumatic situations. I'm wondering if you could comment on the application of some of that research regarding PTSD on older people who may be victims of abuse in the workplace.*

Dr. Robert Butler: I haven't actually seen any specific studies along that line. It strikes me as being a very good idea and one that we should be thinking about.

*#8 To what extent might competition between the young and the elderly for work give rise to an atmosphere of resentment and a view of the elderly taking positions that the young may wish for themselves, and lead to competition for jobs? Might it breed a sense of non-entitlement for the elderly? Has this notion contributed towards ageism?*

Dr. Robert Butler: It is not true. The newspapers love to hype the idea of inter-age group conflicts, but study after study in America do not show that. Young people like the idea of older people being taken care of by social security and Medicare. I've seen studies in France of the same thing, no intergenerational conflict. The press would love to see it happen, because it would be very exciting for the newspapers. The last time I visited Geneva and met with the ILO officials, they pointed out that there's no replacement level. That is to say, jobs that older people got did not take away jobs from young people at all.

That is a myth. It is commonly referred to as the myth of the lack of labor, meaning there's only a fixed amount of work. That was applied against minorities, it was applied against women, and now it can be applied against old people: that they are going to take away jobs. They are not. There is no scientific evidence that that happens. However this notion has contributed toward ageism.

*#9 There was a number of anti-labor pieces of legislation that were passed during the last presidential administration, that were very much pro-company versus labor. They created a situation where the average worker never increased his income and cost of living status over all eight years. The financial gain for the company executives, as you all know, was unusually enormous. In that process were the elderly particularly hurt by those pieces of legislation?*

Dr. Robert Butler: I don't know specifically that the elderly were affected, but certainly we've had growing inequality in income and assets among the generations and among all peoples. That has not been good. A little tangential, but it reminds me, if General Motors had shown some foresight, which they did not show as far as I could see, the reason car competition for America became so tough was we did not have universal health insurance. When GM, or Ford, or Chrysler sells a car they have to charge \$1,600 more dollars for their automobile than the Germans or the Japanese because the Germans and Japanese have national health insurance and we don't. I hope US business leaders begin to catch on. It is in our own best interest to define and support national health insurance.

*#10 This is a follow up question about whether old people and young compete for jobs. It was heartened to learn that they don't generally. Is this still true in tight economic times? I understood that one of the reasons that social security was enacted when it did during the great depression was that people wanted to create more incentives for the elderly to leave paid employment to make more opportunities for younger workers.*

Dr. Robert Butler: No. Social security history is something you should all really study. I could reread and enjoy enormously Arthur Schlesinger's "History of the New Deal", which is a three volume history. Even though you know the end of the story it's a page turner. One of those fascinating things is the kinds of considerations that led to social security. How many of you are aware of the Townsend Movement? There are at least a fourth of you that know about a doctor who's name was Townsend. He was looking out of his window one day on retirement in southeast California and saw some older women rummaging in garbage cans trying to get food. He had this idea that if the government gave \$200 a month to everybody over 60, provided they had to spend it within that month. He understood the importance of the consumer to the economy. Before long there were twelve other Townsend clubs all over the United States. The unique thing about the Townsend Clubs was they were not segregated. Black and white citizens came together in spite of segregation at that time in United States history. This was 1933, '34, '35 and it had a terrific impact upon the considerations that the Roosevelt administration wanted to do anyway: it gave his administration some real power to promote federal progressive social welfare polities. There were other forces that played a part as well. The idea that

the social security program was enacted was just to replace jobs that were being taken away by old people was not really a major consideration.

*#11 Some older people would like to work longer and some would like to retire. Those who want to work longer view the necessity of retiring as a negative issue. Those who want to retire view working longer as a negative issue. Older people need a movement in order to be able to advocate for themselves and this issue is a major barrier to unity. How would members of the panel propose that this be resolved?*

Dr. Robert Butler: I think it's wonderful that we have a free society and a volunteer society, so those who want to retire are able to do so. Those who want to continue to work are the ones in most need of protection. The group within AARP, that includes people like Sarah Riggs and Lauren McCann, are terrific because they have been leading the way in legal struggles to protect older workers. There is a kind of movement already afoot within AARP to try to help to make it possible for those who want to continue to work. But I agree with you, those who want to retire don't want compulsory work.



### ***About the Presenters***

**Robert N. Butler, M.D.**, President and Chief Executive Officer and Co-Chair of the Alliance for Health and the Future of the International Longevity Center - USA, and professor of geriatrics at the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Adult Development at the Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City. Physician, gerontologist, psychiatrist, public servant, and Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Why Survive?*. The late Dr. Butler became the founding director of the National Institute on Aging of the National Institutes of Health in 1975, and in 1982 he founded the first department of geriatrics in a U.S. medical school at The Mount Sinai Medical Center. (Keynote)

**Elena Gastaldo, Program Officer**, International Labour Organization/New York

**Eliyanna Kaiser, Chief of Staff to Mikah Z. Kellner**, New York State Assembly Member, 65<sup>th</sup> District, New York City

**Mebane E. Powell, MSW**, Fordham University, Graduate School of Social Service. Mebane is a doctoral student at the Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service, and is research Associate at the New York City Department for the Aging Office of Research. She received the 2004 New York State Society on Aging Student Award, currently working as a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Social Service at Fordham University and also as a research associate at The New York City Department of Aging. Mebane has had experience as a domestic violence counselor, educator, and group facilitator.

### ***Co-Chairs of Sub-Committee on Elder Abuse, NGO Committee on Ageing***

- **Margot Nadien, PhD**, Co-Chair of the Elder Abuse Subcommittee of the NGO Committee on Aging, and an associate professor of psychology at Fordham University.
- **Patricia Brownell, PhD**: Co-chair of the Subcommittee of Elder Abuse of the Committee on Aging, who also represents the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) and is Faculty Director of the Institute for Women and Girls at Fordham University.

### ***Special Recognition:***

- **Florence Denmark, PhD**: Past-Chair, NGO of the NGO Committee on Ageing.
- **Jessica Frank, MPA**: the Aging Committee's program chair and is the incoming chair of the Aging Committee.
- **Susan B. Somers, JD**, Secretary General, International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse

## Citations and Suggested Readings

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## SUGGESTED ACTIONS

**The NGO Committee on Ageing Sub-Committee on Elder Abuse is committed to education, advocacy and promotion of human rights, dignity, safety and social inclusion of older adults who may experience or be at risk of elder mistreatment and abuse. The primary activity of the sub-committee is to plan and implement a program for the NGO Committee on Ageing on scholarship related to promotion of awareness and prevention of elder abuse on or around June 15, which is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD).**

**Other activities include formulating statements related to elder abuse prevention and awareness for major United Nations events and hearings, and commenting on documents for review with an eye toward ensuring that issues of elder abuse and exploitation are addressed.**

**In accordance with its Mission,** The Sub-Committee on Elder Abuse, in keeping with its Mission Statement, encourages NGOs to use and expand on action steps listed here to:

- Promote awareness of ageism in the workplace, in volunteer settings and in society
- Raise awareness about ageism and mistreatment of older adults, using places of worship, universities and schools and other social settings
- Advocate for legislation and regulation promoting anti-discrimination against older adults in the workplace and mistreatment of older adults in workplace settings, and government enforcement of anti-discrimination against older adults
- Educate members of NGOs and other organizations of the meaning of ageism as it pertains to older adults in the workplace and volunteer settings, and how to address it in a positive way
- Inform employers of how to promote enabling and nurturing work environments and policies for employees of all ages including older adult employees
- Promote interest in research and scholarly publications on discrimination and abuse of older adults in the workplace, and disseminate through journals, white papers, books, symposia and other forms of scholarship
- Write the United Nations in support of recognizing the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, held on June 15 each year, as a United Nations Day.

# NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING

## PROGRAMME

### "COMBATING AGEISM IN THE WORKPLACE"

**DATE:** THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2009

**TIME:** 1:00 - 3:00 PM

**PLACE:** UNITED NATIONS CHURCH CENTER  
777 UN PLAZA (44<sup>TH</sup> STREET & 1<sup>ST</sup> AVE.)

#### **SPEAKERS:**

- **Robert N. Butler, M.D.**, President and Chief Executive Officer and Co-Chair of the Alliance for Health and the Future of the International Longevity Center - USA, and professor of geriatrics at the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Adult Development at the Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City (Keynote)
- **Elena Gastaldo, Program Officer**, International Labour Organization/New York
- **Eliyanna Kaiser, Chief of Staff to Mikah Z. Kellner**, New York State Assembly Member, 65<sup>th</sup> District, New York City
- **Mebane E. Powell, MSW**, Fordham University, Graduate School of Social Service.

#### **ABOUT THE PROGRAM:**

*"Ageism is a form of systemic stereotyping and discrimination against people simply because they are old" (Butler, 2008, p.40). People are living longer and healthier lives, and are continuing to make contributions both in paid employment and civic engagement long after they turn 60 years of age (MIPAA, 2003). Elder abuse is thought to occur only behind closed doors with care dependent victims. However, mistreatment of older people is often not recognized as abuse when it occurs in the workplace. This program celebrates productive ageing by fostering understanding of ageism as a form of older adult employee mistreatment in the workplace, and discussing organizational and legal remedies from both international and local perspectives.*

**Signed copies of Dr. Robert N. Butler's new book, The Longevity Revolution: The Benefits and Challenges of Living a Long Life, will be available for \$20: checks payable to the NGO Committee on Ageing.**

**For more information on this program contact the NGO Committee on Ageing:**

Florence Denmark, Chair

Tel: 212-346-1551 or Email: [fdenmark@pace.edu](mailto:fdenmark@pace.edu)

Website: <http://ngocoa-ny.org/>

