

MEDIA STATEMENT



World Elder Abuse Awareness Day
15 June 2022

UN experts urge States to address violence, abuse and neglect of older women

GENEVA (14 June 2022) – *A group of UN human rights experts* have urged Member States to renew their commitment to end all forms of abuse and violence against older women, promote their human rights and act against pervasive sexist and ageist attitudes. On the occasion of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Claudia Mahler, joined by other UN human rights experts, issued the following statement:*

Around the world, thousands of older women continue to be silenced by the persistence of discriminatory societal attitudes and a lack of attention to abuse and violence. In 2020, around one in six people aged 60 and above experienced some form of abuse in community settings. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the rates of violence against older persons, including older women, and cases of domestic violence increased considerably. According to UN Women, 34 percent of women aged 60 and over reported experiencing violence or knowing someone who has, since the beginning of the pandemic. In this recent context, there is a critical need to acknowledge and document the extent to which violence against older women is widespread within our ageing societies.

Violence against older women remains an unspoken issue in many societies and a taboo grounded in deep-rooted sexist and ageist prejudices and stereotypes and discriminatory cultural and social norms. Power dynamics and inequalities leading to emotional, financial, material, physical and sexual violence are likely to exacerbate with older age.

The intersection between age and gender compounding and affecting risk factors, types of perpetrators, forms and impacts of violence, abuse and neglect remains insufficiently understood and researched. Studies show that perpetrators are most commonly a male intimate partner, a family member or a caregiver. Older women living in institutional settings, especially older women with disabilities and dementia, are at heightened risk of violence, abuse, and neglect, as they usually represent the majority of residents. Older women, especially widows, are also the targets of harmful traditional practices and

customs, often linked to poverty and lack of legal protection. Humanitarian crises and armed conflicts and all forms of violence also disproportionately impacts on older women. Sexual violence against older women is prevalent but continues to be largely ignored due to erroneous assumptions that sexuality and sexual violence disappear with age.

In some situations, societal and cultural norms expect older women to be respected and cared for by their family and society, making it socially unacceptable to speak out and report violence, abuse, and neglect.

The absence of large-scale research initiatives and insufficient data keep the struggle and suffering of abused older women invisible, making their situation more vulnerable by the day.

Laws, policies, and awareness-raising campaigns on abuse of older persons are often inadequate as they do not sufficiently integrate a gender perspective in addition to the curtailed access to justice to report and redress elder abuse. Campaigns on violence against women rarely consider the specific risks and disadvantages faced by older women.

Today, as we shed light on the scourge of elder abuse, we urge Member States to renew their commitment to end all forms of abuse and violence against older women, to ensure their protection and meaningful participation, to promote their human rights, to integrate age in data collection about gender-based violence, and efficiently act against pervasive sexist and ageist attitudes.

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To read more about the human rights of older women, check out the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons' 2021 report to the General Assembly available [here](#).

****The experts: Ms. Claudia Mahler, [Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons](#); M. Gerard Quinn, [Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities](#); Ms. Melissa Upreti (Chair), Ms. Dorothy Estrada Tanck (Vice-Chair), Ms. Elizabeth Broderick, Ms. Ivana Radačić, and Ms. Meskerem Geset Techane, [Working Group on discrimination against women and girls](#); Ms. Reem Alsalem, [Special Rapporteur on violence against women its causes and consequences](#); Ms. Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond, [Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism](#); M. Victor Madrigal-Borloz, [Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity](#).***

The Special Rapporteurs and Independent Experts are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures' experts work on a

voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity. For further information and media inquiries, please contact by email Claire Mathellié (claire.mathellie@un.org) or hrc-ie-olderpersons@un.org For media enquiries regarding other UN independent experts, please contact Renato de Souza (+41 22 928 9855 / renato.rosariodesouza@un.org or Dharisha Indraguptha (+41 79561088 / [dharisha.indraguptha@un.org](mailto:धारिशा.इन्द्रगुप्ता@un.org)) Follow news related to the UN's independent human rights experts on Twitter [@UN_SPExperts](https://twitter.com/UN_SPExperts).

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