

[The 19th AGAC Roundtable about the Human Rights of Older Persons]

Meeting Summary

1. Date and Time: August 21 (Thursday), 2025, 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM (KST)

2. Venue: Meeting Room, AGAC

3. Participants (7 persons)

o Moderator: LEE, HyeKyung (Executive Director, AGAC)

o Presenter: PEREL-LEVIN, Silvia (Independent consultant on ageing, health and human rights of older persons/ Vice-Chair, NGO Committee on Ageing, Geneva Editor of 「Ageing of the Oppressed - A pandemic of intersecting injustice」)

o Discussants:

- CHUNG, Chinsung (Professor Emerita of Sociology, Seoul National University/ Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination)
- PARK, Yeong-Ran (Board of Directors, AGAC/ Professor, Department of Silver Industry, Kangnam University)
- CHO, Hyunse (Board of Directors, AGAC/ President, HelpAge Korea)
- PARK, Yookyong (Deputy Director, National Human Rights Commission of Korea)

o Participant from AGAC: KOH, Geun (Operations Director)

4. Main Topics

- An introduction to the NGO Committee on Ageing in Geneva and the International Longevity Centre (both the Global Alliance and Israel) — and their activities
- Legal protection gaps for older persons: the case for a UN Convention
- Participation and voice: ensuring older persons' agency in policymaking

5. Summary of the Meeting

Silvia served as a chair of the NGO Committee on Ageing in Geneva and still actively leads the Committee as a Vice-Chair. She is also a representative to the UN of the International Network for the Prevention of Elder ABUSE(INPEA) and the International Longevity Centre Global Alliance (ILC GA). As an advocate for the rights of older persons she has been working in the fields of health, ageing and human rights for over 20 years at the World Health Organization, the Union for International Cancer Control and as an independent consultant. Before that, she was a TV, film and theatre producer using the arts as tools for social change.

Introduction and Background

Silvia began her presentation by introducing her professional background and long-standing involvement in the field of elder rights. She has represented the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) for many years and has specialized academically in the intersection of violence and health. Her master's thesis on elder abuse was published by the World Health Organization (WHO). Over time, she shifted from research to advocacy, recognizing that elder abuse is not merely a public health issue but fundamentally a human rights concern.

From Research to Advocacy

While at WHO, Silvia coordinated the first multi-country study on elder abuse, conducted in ten countries with INPEA. The study revealed a striking disconnect: while academics and primary healthcare workers defined abuse in terms of physical, psychological, financial, and sexual violence as well as neglect, older persons defined abuse as a violation of their rights and removal of choice. This insight reframed elder abuse as an issue of autonomy and dignity. The findings were presented at the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), alongside the Toronto Declaration on the Prevention of Elder Abuse.

International Networks and Civil Society Engagement

Silvia described her involvement with the International Longevity Centre (ILC) Global Alliance, a network of 17 national centers engaged in research, advocacy, and education. She also serves with the NGO Committee on Ageing in Geneva and is on the steering group of GAROP (Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People). These networks organize side events at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and facilitate civil society participation. She emphasized that civil society plays a crucial role in UN processes, particularly in Geneva, where NGOs can participate in informal negotiations on resolutions.

Regional and National Activities

In Israel, Silvia has worked with ILC Israel and WHO to prepare a national conference on human rights, health, and the role of cities and communities. She highlighted community-based projects such as PhotoVoice exhibitions documenting the experiences of older persons displaced after the October 7 attacks. She also collaborates with Oxford University on the ethical and human rights implications of artificial intelligence in care. She stressed the importance of integrating human rights perspectives into age-friendly cities and communities.

Gaps in International Human Rights Frameworks

Silvia pointed out that no binding international convention exists on the rights of older persons. While older adults are theoretically covered under general human rights treaties, in practice they are ignored. Reporting bodies often fail to include them, with some governments openly admitting they had 'no space' to mention older persons. Data collection is also inadequate, as global statistics on violence against women typically exclude women over 50. This absence underscores the need for a new legally binding convention.

Political Processes and Advocacy for a Convention

Silvia recounted the history of negotiations. The Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) in New York has been deadlocked for over a decade, while Geneva has seen

more progress through the HRC. Since 2013, the Council has appointed an Independent Expert on the rights of older persons, and in 2021, it passed the first substantive resolution on ageism. Between the 13th and 14th sessions of OEWGA, Portugal and Brazil conducted extensive consultations, bringing in experts and civil society to discuss whether normative gaps exist. While countries like Germany continued to argue that no such gaps exist, many others affirmed that they do. The outcome was a recommendation that a legally binding instrument is necessary. Core sponsors include Argentina, Brazil, Slovenia, Gambia, and the Philippines. Support for a convention has been growing, with cross-regional backing from over 80 states, although Germany and France remain hesitant due to fiscal concerns.

Looking Ahead: Timeline and Priorities

Silvia outlined a realistic timeline: at least five years of negotiations will be required to build consensus. The process should start with broad agreement on issues such as prohibiting elder abuse and gradually address more contentious topics like gender and legal capacity. She predicted that the Third World Assembly on Ageing will not occur before 2032, ideally after a new convention has been adopted.

Conclusion

Silvia concluded by stressing that a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons is essential to fill normative gaps, provide accountability, and equip governments with guidance on implementation. It will introduce new language into international law, strengthen existing treaties, and elevate the visibility of older persons in global agendas. Human rights, she emphasized, are obligations of states rather than acts of kindness, and civil society must continue to provide evidence, build alliances, and ensure that older persons' voices are heard.