

Verbal and online abuse violating human rights of older persons must be stamped out – UN expert

GENEVA (12 June 2020) – *The newly appointed UN Independent Expert* on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Claudia Mahler, urges all governments and the international community to exercise global solidarity and step up action to effectively prevent and protect older persons from physical and psychological abuse, including neglect. She made the following statement ahead of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on 15 June:*

“While older persons have become more visible in the COVID-19 outbreak, their voices, opinions and concerns remain unheard. With the number of older persons dying in homes, hospitals and institutions growing exponentially all over the world, it is disheartening to continue to read cruel and dehumanising language on social media referring to older persons. Verbal abuse clearly occurs in contexts when older persons face old age discrimination (‘ageism’).

Verbal and derogatory online abuse have profound negative effects on the human rights of older persons. Negative and sometimes unfounded comments severely impact their physical and mental health, promote negative images or in the worst cases lead to violence, abuse and neglect of older persons.

Derogatory comments in the media are a direct attack against the dignity of older persons. The ‘boomer remover’ hashtag attached to coronavirus posts and media articles calling for older persons to sacrifice themselves to save the economy or to safeguard younger generations by exposing themselves to the virus are clearly reflections of bias against older persons. Policies based on ageist attitudes cannot be tolerated and I urge States to monitor and implement measures to avoid ageist approaches. Older persons need to have access to accountability mechanisms that provide for remedies and redress when their human rights are violated.

I also want to raise awareness that violence, abuse and neglect do not only occur in the open and very often are not visible to society. Societies must raise their voices against verbal abuse and older persons, especially older women, must be included in the discussion on prevention of all types of violence against them.

Verbal abuse often occurs in tandem with mental, psychological, physical, sexual or financial abuse and I urge social media to do their part and at least not enable abuse by propagating messaging that violates human rights of older persons.”

ENDS

* **MsClaudia Mahler** (Austria) was appointed by Human Rights Council as the [*Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons*](#) in May 2020. Besides her

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work as a senior researcher at the German Institute for Human Rights, Ms Mahler is a visiting professor at the Alice Salomon Hochschule. She also has an extensive career in research at the Human Rights Centre of the University of Potsdam.

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