



October 1st, 2022

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION STATEMENT COMMEMORATING ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS

On 14th December 1990, the United Nations General Assembly designated October 1st as the International Day of Older Persons to raise awareness on the need to respond to the opportunities and challenges of population ageing and to promote the development of a society for all ages.

Today, Saturday 1st October, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and its Thematic Committee on the Rights of Older Persons join the rest of the world to commemorate International Day of Older Persons on the theme *'The Resilience and Contributions of Older Women'*. The Day not only celebrates the lives and significant contributions that older persons, particularly older women, make to both community and society but is also used to raise awareness on the many challenges that they face across the world.

In The Gambia, older women have always played a very significant role in the family, and in the political, socio-economic and cultural lives and development of the country. They provide important child-care services, support in looking after the sick and the infirm in the community, contribute to the sustenance of the family through their various economic activities, and serve as 'protectors' of family heritage and history. Others continue to volunteer their services for community development and in other charity works. While these contributions are for the most part unpaid, invisible, unrecognized and often taken for granted, they remain very real and absolutely necessary for the survival of the family and society, and to the development of the country. Overburdening older women with such gendered roles has significantly cemented their marginalization from key decision-making roles, which continue to create barriers in their contributions towards informing national policies and frameworks.

The resilience and contributions of our older women have become more pronounced over the past few years with the disruptive impact of COVID-19, the increasing cost of living, and in climate change induced catastrophes, including flash floods and food insecurity. Many older women, while bearing the brunt of these negative impacts and contending with the gender inequalities embedded in some of our patriarchal systems, continue to play a critical role in helping their families and communities adapt to these unprecedented changes. Their resilience, innovative responses and invisible but invaluable contributions have enabled families to withstand these difficulties.

Despite the significant contributions of older women to the health and general wellbeing of the family and society, and the high status they are expected to be accorded, they continue, for the most part, to face enormous challenges including age discrimination or ageism; stigmatization, neglect and abandonment that often come with ageing; accusation of witchcraft; inadequate access to health care services; marginalization in decision making; and abuse and violence as widows. Intersectoral factors such as disabilities, social status and poverty, exacerbate and

compound the vulnerabilities of older women to other forms of human rights violations which have economic and socio-cultural implications. Such implications are further exacerbated by the absence of sufficient legal frameworks and programmes that exclusively guarantee the protection and fulfilment of the rights of older persons as much as other vulnerable groups. While some progress has been made in recognizing and protecting the rights of older persons, the generic and implicit provisions made in international, regional and national instruments and policies leave significant gaps in guaranteeing the economic, social and cultural rights of older women.

It is estimated that about 4 percent of our population is over 60 years. This percentage is expected to increase to 12 per cent by 2050 with an increase in life expectancy as a result of the country's growth in its human development profile. To meet the demands of our ageing population we call on all people living in The Gambia, in particular the political and community leaders, Civil Society, the Government, and the private sector to commit to working together to ensure that our older persons have the requisite care, dignity, independence, self-fulfillment and the opportunity to participate in family and community lives as envisaged in the UN Principles on Older Persons.

We further call on the Government to:

1. Ratify and domesticate the AU Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa.
2. Provide older persons with comprehensive and accessible free health care services and health insurance coverage.
3. Develop robust social safety nets and expand the social protection programme to include older persons across the country.
4. Expand the pension scheme to include all older persons, whether previously employed by the State or not.
5. Effectively protect and fulfil the human rights of older men and women as guaranteed under the 1997 Constitution and Women's Act 2010; and
6. Ensure the inclusion of older persons in policy design at all levels of decision making
7. Gender mainstreaming of policies and programmes on the rights of older persons?

Emmanuel Danie Joof
Chairperson