

Secretary-General Urges ‘Forcefully Rejecting’ Ageism, in Message for International Day of Older Persons

Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s message on the International Day of Older Persons, to be observed on 1 October:

The International Day of Older Persons is our chance to take a stand against the destructive problem of ageism.

While older persons are often said to enjoy particular respect, the reality is that too many societies limit them, denying access to jobs, loans and basic services. The marginalization and devaluing of older persons takes a heavy toll. It undermines their productivity and experience in the workforce, in volunteerism and through civil engagement while constraining their capacity for caregiving as well as financial and other support to families and communities. Ageism frequently intersects with other forms of discrimination based on gender, race, disability and other grounds, compounding and intensifying its effects.

Ending ageism and securing the human rights of older persons is an ethical and practical imperative. The stakes are high and growing. The global population of older persons is expected to rise from just over 900 million in 2015 to 1.4 billion by 2030 and 2.1 billion by 2050, when there will be roughly the same the number of older persons and children under 15.

I condemn ageism in all its forms and call for measures to address this violation of human rights as we strive to improve societies for people of all ages. This demands changing the way older persons are portrayed and perceived, from being seen as a burden to being appreciated for the many positive contributions they make to our human family.

I also call for greater legal guarantees of equality for older persons to prevent ageism from resulting in discriminatory policies, laws and treatment. I urge policymakers to compile better data and statistics on older persons’ health, economic status and general well-being in order to better address their concerns. And I hope we will all reflect on our prejudicial attitudes and consider how, as individuals, we can counter ageism.

We have a clear road map to transformation: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This visionary plan and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize inclusion and equality, promising to leave no one behind. Older persons are both agents and beneficiaries of change. By advancing progress on the SDGs, we can mobilize the considerable talents, energy and experience of all older persons in carrying out this Agenda.

Let us mark the International Day of Older Persons by forcefully rejecting all forms of ageism and working to enable older persons to realize their potential as we honour our pledge to build a life of dignity and human rights for all.