



Human Rights do not have a best before date

The Honourable Francois-Philippe Champagne
Minister of Foreign Affairs
The Honourable Deb Schulte
Minister of Seniors
Parliament of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario Canada
K1A 0A6

December 11, 2020

Dear Ministers Champagne and Schulte:

By way of introduction, International Longevity Centre Canadaⁱ is a think-tank focused on the human rights of older persons and is part of a Global Allianceⁱⁱ of 16 International Longevity Centers.

We are writing to express our abhorrence at the egregious mistreatment of older people in Canada and around the world during the COVID 19 pandemic. This global crisis has clearly demonstrated the very real lethalⁱⁱⁱ impact of ageism on the fundamental human rights of older people as evidenced by: the appalling mistreatment of older Canadians in Long-term Care^{iv}; systematic and severe restrictions to health care, resulting in the culling of older persons in Italy^v; and the treatment of older people in the press and media.

As per the adage, “what you permit, you promote”, any country that permits human rights violations needs to be held accountable. It is urgent and imperative that Canada take definitive action to lead the world in upholding fundamental human rights, something our nation is so well respected for historically. We are demanding that the Canadian Government take immediate and decisive steps toward leading and supporting a United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of all Older Persons.

The merits of a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons have previously been discussed in writing with your predecessors, Ministers Freeland and Tassi, on July 14, 2018 and again on August 21, 2018 with a follow up meeting with Minister Tassi on October 4, 2018. We were very encouraged after our first letter in July, 2018, when the Canadian Delegate to the Open-ended Working Group on Aging at the UN stated that “Canada would like to thank the International Longevity Centre of Canada, as well as the other NGO’s and... Canada is open to discussing the idea of a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.” This statement led to spontaneous applause from all international NGO’s as Canada would have been the first developed country to support the Human Rights of Older Persons through a Convention. This was followed by months of silence prompting us to write to the Ministers on June 2, 2019. Unfortunately, the communication from your predecessors dated August 29, 2019 was less positive. It stated that the “Government of Canada remains open to discussing the idea of a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons and believes it is important to listen to the view of Member States and stakeholders.”

Canada must not shrug off the responsibility to protect the human rights of older Canadians by abdicating it to elusive “Member States” or “stakeholders.” Moreover, the pandemic’s impact on older people has illustrated that your predecessor’s suggestion that “Member States can better implement existing international human rights obligations to protect and strengthen the rights of older people” is, at best, wishful thinking. If this line of reasoning were correct, there would have been no need for any special UN Conventions - for Women, for Children, for Indigenous Persons or for Persons with Disabilities, to name a few. We must put aside platitudinous arguments that “goodwill” or “soft law” like the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging will protect the rights of older people when the pandemic has clearly exposed that it is not the case.

The time to act is *now*.
The time to change is *now*.
The time to stop this “pandemic of ageism” is *now*.

As our Prime Minister, in his speech to the Commons on April 11th, 2020 so eloquently proclaimed: “Our job as Canadians is to uphold the dignity and sanctity of every single human life, whether they be rich or poor, young or old, ailing or healthy.” We challenge the Canadian Government to put ACTION to these words; to stand up and lead the world in protecting the basic human rights of every older person; to proudly enshrine the tradition earned by Canada as a global leader of human rights by supporting and leading the fight for a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.

We await your response.

Best,



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cc: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada

The Honourable Erin Michael O'Toole
Leader of the Official Opposition

Mr. Jagmeet Singh
Leader, New Democratic Party

Ms. Annamie Paul
Leader, Green Party of Canada

(This version of the letter has been updated from original letter dated April 17, 2020 with current political party leaders' information)

ⁱ <https://www.ilccanada.org/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.ilc-alliance.org/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6912e2.htm>

^{iv} <https://globalnews.ca/news/6828045/long-term-care-homes-most-coronavirus-deaths-canada/>

^v <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1105061/coronavirus-deaths-by-region-in-italy/>