



**Women and Equalities
Committee**

17 April 2024

**Lord Ahmad
Minister of State (Middle East, North Africa,
South Asia, United Nations and the Commonwealth)
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

Dear Tariq,

The Women and Equalities Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry into the rights of older people. The Committee attended a number of meetings on this subject while at the recent Commission on the Status of Women.

It has come to the attention of the Women and Equalities Committee that the UN will be meeting in May to discuss the rights of older persons under the auspices of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG). We consider the UK Government's engagement with this process as being of the utmost importance. As you will be aware, women outnumber men in later life across the globe, so this is an agenda that also directly affects the rights of women as well as those of older people in general.

Older women continue to face multiple challenges due to sexism and inequalities accrued across the life course. This is compounded in later life due to ageism, yet there is no universal prohibition of discrimination on the basis of age under international human rights law. The Committee believes it is vital that the UK Government devotes its full attention to the negotiations taking place in New York regarding the rights of older persons.

We understand that Member States will be negotiating recommendations coming out of an intersessional process of the OEWG that will have critical importance for determining how discussions regarding the human rights of older persons are taken forward in the UN. We hope the Government will play a full, active and constructive role in ensuring that the rights of older women and men worldwide are protected. We also hope that the UK will help to ensure that the conclusions of the process include an explicit recognition that there are gaps in the protection of the human rights of older persons and that existing measures are not sufficient for protecting the rights of older persons.

The consistent lack of attention to the rights of older women and men in international policy making reinforces the need for the UK Government to use its visibility on the international stage to champion older women's and men's rights. We support calls for the drafting of a UN convention on the rights of older persons. We hope that the UK will also support those calls within the UN negotiations and ensure that a human rights convention is clearly identified as one of the responses for addressing the gaps that have been recognised.

Ageing issues are not gender-neutral and the international human rights system needs the guidance, legal certainty and accountability that a convention on the rights of older persons would bring, to ensure that States and other parties fully understand that older women's rights are human rights and need protecting.

We appreciate the constructive role that the UK Government has been playing in the OEWG and hope that the Government will be represented at the highest level at the UN in May to signal its support for protecting the rights of older women and men.

I will be placing a copy of this letter and your reply in the public domain.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Caroline'.

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Chair, Women and Equalities Committee