



Brotherhood of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

MEDIA RELEASE

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Brotherhood joins international UN working group to advocate for rights of older people

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is pleased to have joined the *United Nations' Open Working Group on Older People* as a step in recognising the special needs of older Australians in our rapidly changing society.

'Older people have made a significant contribution to our success' say Simon Biggs, Brotherhood Chair at the University of Melbourne and Senior Manager, Retirement and Ageing at the Brotherhood of St Laurence. 'Just as the vulnerabilities of women and children has been recognised by human rights law we support the introduction of a Convention for older people to make sure they are not penalised'.

'At the annual meeting of NGOs on 21 August we will be encouraging Australia to adopt the Convention to support the human rights of older people internationally. We believe the Convention would improve the position of older people in Australia in so far as it would reduce the marginalisation of older people, increase their social inclusion and help eliminate disadvantage specifically associated with later life.

'Our new Social Policy Working Paper [The rights of older people](#) provides an excellent overview of the reasons by the human rights of older people would be supported by the Convention.'

Research and review indicates that older people face distinctive challenges in later life:

Discrimination

To be discriminated against is a violation of one's human rights. Social ageism is a specific prejudice against and stereotyping of persons based on their age, which is particularly found in later life. Where age discrimination has been prohibited by law, this usually only relates to employment and not other areas such as social care, healthcare or other services.

Poverty

Older persons are disproportionately affected by poverty for various reasons: the mandatory retirement ages in some countries; inheritance laws that deny women the right to own or inherit property when their husband dies; susceptibility to illness and disability; or financial exploitation —each contribute to age-related forms of economic disadvantage. Further, millions of older persons world-wide do not have access to pensions or adequate social assistance, nor do they have a regular income.

Abuse and violence

The increased physical vulnerability of older persons causes greater susceptibility to violence and abuse—at home, in care settings, or in times of conflict. Abuse may take the form of discrete neglect; street crime; verbal, sexual, financial abuse; and psychological or physical violence.

Physical and mental health

Special measures are necessary to ensure the guarantee the rights of older persons in relation to health. These include the right to a reasonable quality of life, information, privacy, personal integrity, and freedom of movement.

['The rights of older people: Protection and gaps under human rights law'](#) by Marthe Fredvang and Simon Biggs. The Social Policy Working Paper series is jointly produced with the Centre for Public Policy at the University of Melbourne

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For more information about the Brotherhood's work with older people go to
www.bsl.org.au/services/older-people