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**The world's older population is exploding in size at an unprecedented rate. Older persons face significant challenges yet remain a low priority on the human rights agenda. Older persons possess the potential to positively impact economies, politics and communities if we encourage these contributions. The process of aging is common to each of us - the human rights of older people affect all of us.**

How do you wish to spend your older years? Would you continue working, perhaps on a part time basis? Do you dream of traveling, volunteering, hobbies, visits with grandchildren? Active and healthy aging is everyone's goal. The realities of aging, however, may bring a different story. Health problems, age discrimination, elder abuse, and poverty are but a few of the hardships that can accompany older age even in developed countries.

Around the globe, people are living longer. The number of persons age 60 and older is projected to hit two billion by the year 2050 - which is more than double the current number. And with many nations experiencing lower birth rates, older persons are commanding a greater proportion of the world population.

The age group breaking all records is persons 80 and older, who are primarily women. The 'oldest old' is the world's fastest growing population group, expected to increase its numbers 233 per cent by the year 2040.

The vast majority of older persons - 79% - will live in less developed regions of the world, which struggle with many important priorities competing for resources. One can only wonder whether the concerns of older persons will rise above the clamor for education, health care, infrastructure, crime control.

The lives and capabilities of older persons are as diverse as those of younger persons. Nevertheless,

societies stereotype older persons as founts of wisdom but with little productive value. Older persons are often given little chance to contribute to their communities beyond the (stereotypical) roles of story tellers and carers of grandchildren.

Human rights are about giving people the chance to live their ideas of a good life. I doubt, however, that any person views demeaning stereotypes, loss of independence, poor health care or forced retirement as constituting a good life.

How old will *you* be in the year 2040? Think about it and consider this your wake-up call! This topic - the lives and rights of older persons - is about *each of us*. If I want a world in 2040 which allows me to live fully, to participate and contribute, I need to act now. If I want a world which will protect and support an older me if I have health problems or inadequate income, I need to act now.

The world's perception of older persons will not change overnight and neither will the policies of governments. The slow process of strengthening the human rights of older persons starts now and the first step is awareness. Think beyond your parents or grandparents, to yourself - to your children. Imagine the world you want and start making it happen.