Why We Need a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons: Need for Global Action & Role of Canadian Leadership

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40 Why We Need a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons: Need for Global Action & Role of Canadian Leadership

Chair

Kiran Rabheru
ILCC, CCAA, U of O, BHRI, Ottawa, Canada

Discussant

Margaret Gillis
ILCC, CCAA, ILC GA, Canada

741 Why We Need a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons: A Call for Global Action with a Discussion on the Role of Canadian Leadership

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Abstract / Résumé

Older persons worldwide face persistent ageism, social exclusion, and systemic violations of their human rights. The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare these inequities, highlighting the urgent need for international legal protection. This symposium, led by the International Longevity Centre Canada (ILC Canada) and the Canadian Coalition Against Ageism (CCAA), makes the case for a United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons and outlines the vital role that Canadian leadership and civil society are playing to advance this effort globally.

Chaired by Kiran Rabheru, the symposium will include Margaret Gillis on Canada's diplomatic engagement at the United Nations; Laura Kadowaki on evidence of systemic ageism and policy failure; Olive Bryanton on the lived experience of older women in rural contexts; and Kahir Lalji on equity, intersectionality, and community-led advocacy. The session will connect global frameworks with grassroots mobilization, illustrating how radical relationality—across generations, communities, and systems—is central to human rights in later life.

This session responds directly to CAG2025's theme of Radical Relationality and Aging by advancing collective action, structural change, and a vision of inclusive, rights-based aging.

Join us. Join the CCAA. Support the UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. Help build a world where older people can fully enjoy their human rights free of all forms of discrimination, including ageism.

We gratefully acknowledge all members of ILC Canada and the Canadian Coalition Against Ageism as contributors to this movement and to the work presented in this symposium.

619 Tackling Ageism in Real Time: Launching Canada's Ageism Awareness Module and Toolkit for Intergenerational Action

Kiran Rabheru[1], Laura Kadowaki[2], Olive Bryanton[3], Barabara McMillan[4]
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Abstract / Résumé

This workshop will introduce participants to two novel resources from the Canadian Coalition Against Ageism (CCAA): 1) The Ageism Awareness Module, an introductory educational module for the public and 2) The updated Ageism Awareness Toolkit, a practical, accessible resource to recognize, address, and reduce ageism in real time across sectors. Participants will learn about the module content and the toolkit's origins, key components, and how to adapt and apply it in local and institutional contexts to foster inclusion and intergenerational understanding. The workshop aims to:

1. Increase participants' awareness of the manifestations and consequences of ageism.
2. Demonstrate tools and strategies for challenging ageism; and
3. Facilitate intergenerational dialogue and engagement in ageism awareness efforts.

This session will feature presentations by CCAA leaders and ageism advocates who will share how the module and toolkit were developed and how they are being integrated into advocacy, education, and policy outreach. The workshop will include interactive discussions, live polling, and small group activities where participants will apply toolkit concepts to real-world examples. Emphasis will be placed on fostering student involvement and community engagement to promote age inclusivity and reduce stereotypes through intergenerational approaches.

This workshop aligns with CAG2025's theme Radical Relationality and Aging by equipping participants to build more age-inclusive environments that value the dignity and contributions of people of all ages and backgrounds. Participants will leave with practical tools, inspiration, and a pathway to join Canada's growing movement to end ageism.

798 Documenting the Evidence: Ageism, Policy Gaps, and the Case for a Legal Framework

Laura Kadowaki
United Way British Columbia, Burnaby, Canada

Abstract / Résumé

Ageism in Canada and globally is deeply entrenched in policy, practice, and everyday life, yet remains poorly recognized as a human rights violation. In this presentation, Dr. Laura Kadowaki will present evidence from recent Canadian and international research, including findings from the Ipsos Survey on Ageism, CCAA consultations, and national reports on exclusion in health, housing, employment, and long-term care. Her analysis will illustrate the limitations of current legal frameworks in protecting older persons and the absence of enforceable mechanisms for accountability. Using a social determinants of health lens, she will demonstrate how ageism intersects with gender, race, disability, and income to deepen marginalization and limit access to rights. Dr. Kadowaki will argue that only a binding international convention—backed by state obligations, reporting structures, and public education—can address these structural injustices. She will also highlight the importance of meaningful participation by older persons in shaping policy and legal reforms, in line with the UN's human rights-based approach. Participants will be introduced to practical pathways for integrating evidence into advocacy, and how academic institutions and community organizations can contribute to the global campaign for UNCROP. This session underscores

the importance of linking empirical evidence to rights-based frameworks and offers a compelling rationale for urgent international legal reform.

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800 Intersectionality and Community Power: Building a More Just Aging Future

Kahir Lalji
International Longevity Centre Canada, Ottawa, Canada

Abstract / Résumé

Kahir Lalji will focus on the intersectional dimensions of aging and the importance of centering equity, community leadership, and cultural context in the global campaign for a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons (UNCROP). As a recognized leader in community-based aging advocacy, including in Indigenous, immigrant, and culturally diverse communities, Lalji will highlight how ageism does not operate in isolation. It is compounded by racism, colonization, ableism, and poverty—especially in historically excluded populations. Drawing from his work in British Columbia and across Canada, he will share stories and data that reveal the inequities faced by racialized and marginalized older persons in housing, healthcare, social services, and civic engagement. He will also highlight models of resistance and community power that demonstrate how local leadership and cultural safety are essential to rights-based frameworks. Lalji's presentation will emphasize how UNCROP must reflect the pluralistic realities of older persons and recognize the strengths of communities who have been at the margins. In alignment with Radical Relationality, his talk will call for shifting systems toward solidarity, reconciliation, and relational justice. Participants will leave with concrete strategies for advancing intersectional equity in advocacy, policy, and international law. This presentation is a call to ground global change in local leadership—and to build a Convention that reflects the full spectrum of human experience in later life.

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801 Lived Experience and the Rural Lens: Why Older Persons Must Be Central to the UNCROP Movement

Olive Bryanton
International Longevity Centre Canada, Ottawa, Canada

Abstract / Résumé

As a lifelong advocate and older rural woman, Dr. Olive Bryanton brings the lived experience of those often left behind in policy, law, and social discourse. In this presentation, she will highlight how aging in rural Canada magnifies the effects of ageism, especially for older women navigating isolation, digital exclusion, transportation barriers, and healthcare inequities. Despite her advocacy and academic achievements, including a PhD focused on rural aging and lifelong learning, she has witnessed firsthand the absence of systemic protections for the rights of older persons. Dr. Bryanton will argue that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons (UNCROP) must center these lived realities and be shaped by those most affected. She will share stories from the Older Persons Advisory Group (OPAG), formed through the CCAA, and reflect on how participatory leadership and intergenerational dialogue can reframe aging as a time of value, voice, and contribution. Her presentation will affirm the CAG2025 theme of Radical Relationality, calling for relational care, inclusive policymaking, and structures that empower—not silence—older voices. This session invites attendees to listen deeply, reflect critically, and champion the essential principle: nothing about us without us. It is only by including diverse lived experiences that UNCROP can be truly transformative and just.

804 From Advocacy to Accountability: Advancing UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons Through Global Diplomacy and Civil Society Engagement

Margaret Gillis
International Longevity Centre Canada, Ottawa, Canada

Abstract / Résumé

Margaret Gillis, President of ILC Canada and international human rights advocate, will explore how Canadian diplomacy, in collaboration with global civil society, has advanced the call for a United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. Drawing from her experience as a former senior official in the Government of Canada and active participant in the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing, she will provide insight into the challenges and opportunities of influencing global processes to prioritize older persons' rights. This presentation will clarify why current international instruments are insufficient and how a dedicated convention would provide enforceable protections against ageism, elder abuse, exclusion from health and social care, and denial of autonomy. Gillis will reflect on the strategic advocacy undertaken by ILC Canada and its global partners, including cross-regional alliances, rights-based narratives, and the engagement of older persons themselves in shaping the agenda. She will also highlight the need for coordinated national action to hold governments accountable and ensure Canadian leadership remains steadfast. Her remarks will emphasize that the path toward UNCROP is not just legal but moral and relational—anchored in the lived realities of older people across the globe. Attendees will gain tools for supporting UNCROP through their networks and institutions, reinforcing the Canadian and global movement for human rights in aging.

807 Framing the Movement: Canada’s Leadership Toward a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons

Kiran Rabheru
Canadian Coalition Against Ageism, Ottawa, Canada

Abstract / Résumé

This presentation will set the stage for the symposium by outlining the urgent global need for a dedicated international human rights instrument to protect the dignity, autonomy, and rights of older persons. Despite demographic shifts, older people remain systematically excluded from the protections offered to other marginalized groups under international law. Drawing on Canada’s leadership at the United Nations and within civil society, Dr. Rabheru will present the case for a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons (UNCROP) as a necessary and timely response to this growing human rights gap. As Chair of the Canadian Coalition Against Ageism (CCAA) and Senior Advisor to ILC Canada, he will share the strategic efforts made to unify Canadian voices, elevate older persons' lived experiences, and advance a rights-based global movement. This includes the creation of the CCAA, the Older Persons Advisory Group, and Canada's contributions to the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing. His remarks will highlight how radical relationality, intersectional solidarity, and intergenerational collaboration are essential to realizing this vision. Participants will be invited to engage actively with the campaign to support UNCROP and to promote legal accountability frameworks that uphold the rights of older persons everywhere. This presentation calls on scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and advocates to stand in solidarity and help build a global rights-based aging agenda.