



## Our Role in Advocating for Older People


I write today as a gerontologist, as the President of the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development and the current Secretary-General of the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG), but most of all as a concerned citizen of the world. I write to advocate for engagement from all citizens and especially to outline what gerontologists and geriatricians can, should, and, I would say, must do as we look to 2021 and beyond. Worldwide we are living in most difficult times. We are facing a number of significant problems with both current and long-lasting implications. Certainly, this is the case in Brazil, where the coronavirus has hit hard and where economic and political troubles are at crisis levels. Of course, Brazil is not alone. Similar crises are being faced in my own country (the US) and in many countries around the world. All the more reason to emphasize that we are in this together and must work together if we are to successfully address the crises we face.

My comments and recommendations are drawn from my experience as head of the IAGG's UN team. Since the Brazilian Geriatrics and Gerontology Society is a member of IAGG, this means IAGG's UN team is also your team. The team is mainly based at the UN Headquarters in NY and I hope you will be proud to know that one of our long-standing members is Brazil's own Dr. Laura Machado. The main goal of the team is to advocate for older people in issues being addressed by the UN. We participate in the UN Commission on Social Development; UN Commission on Women; UN Open Ended Working Group on Aging; UN High Level Political Forum; UN International Day of the Older Persons (IDOP); Stakeholders Group on Aging; General Assembly of Partners Concerned with Older People, Committee on Aging. As a result, when one of these groups takes up an issue, our team frequently prepares or co-sponsors a complementary UN side event, formal written or oral statement addressing how older people are affected by that issue. Most often the issues taken up are based on the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs)<sup>1,2</sup>. The SDGs outlined a comprehensive plan of action to build a global partnership for sustainable development to improve human lives and protect the environment (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>). Brazilians may know that the origins of these goals can be traced to the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro during which Agenda 21 was adopted by more than 178 countries.

Recently, the UN Commissions have focused on the SDGs. Topics the UN team has addressed include the role and relevance to older people of: Climate Change; Long Term Support and Care; Homelessness; Global Progress through Education, Training, and Life-long Learning; International Day of the Older Person: Decade of Healthy Aging; IDOP/IAGG -Healthy Aging During the COVID-19.

I am not a policy person by training. Nevertheless, as we prepared these pieces for the UN I was particularly impressed by how much of what gerontologists and geriatricians know is relevant to policy. We see the needs of older people and how their needs affect others in their family but also how they contribute to their families and our society, a point that is frequently lost on policy makers who too often think of older people only as a drain or burden. Certainly, the pandemic has shown older people's vulnerability but also their contributions to their families during these difficult times. While I am not advocating that you change careers, since we need you where you are, I do want to highlight that we should take every opportunity to advocate for the rights of older people whenever we can. Further, I think we must recognize that our role as advocates is important not only for older people but for their families and our society. Every issue mentioned above involves not only the older person but also a broader slice of society.

Preparation of the UN statements have provided a clarity for me that I wish to share with you. While we, as gerontologists and geriatricians, care about old people, we also care about people of all ages. Brazilian gerontologist and geriatricians and the Brazilian Geriatric and Gerontology society have important roles to play in assuring the future of older people including through the success of the Decade of Healthy Ageing and in advocating for an International Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. Advocating for and recognizing both the strengths and vulnerabilities of older people can benefit present and future generations, thereby investing in the human rights of all, creating a Society for All Ages.

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## REFERENCES

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