

JOINT STATEMENT

International experts concerned at the decay of older persons' right to health in Venezuela

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Geneva and Washington DC.- Dainius Puras, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and Soledad García Muñoz, IACHR Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights, stressed that the fragile state of the right to health in Venezuela affects in a different manner people and groups in vulnerable situation. Older persons are among these groups due to their special needs and the low quality of care which is detrimental to their physical and mental health.

Both experts indicated that older persons have been especially affected by the crisis of the health system. According to reliable information submitted to the IACHR, between January and July 2018, there have been shortfalls of medicines for insulin-dependent diabetes and hypertension, the major causes of morbidity among older persons; fluctuations range between 89.8% and 78.4% for the first disease and between 89.5% and 74.2% for the second. These figures increase with respect to acute respiratory infections and diarrhea, with maximum peaks of 97.2% and 92.4% shortfalls, respectively. Complaints have also been registered regarding the death of older persons, due to the lack of access to medicines and acts of violence caused by the general situation in-country.

In the last years, the health infrastructure in Venezuela has faced serious difficulties to serve the people, not only due to the general shortage of medical supplies and medicines, but also due to the lack of medical personnel. According to the 2017 National Survey of Physicians and Medical Students, in the last decade, more than 40% of graduates decided to migrate to other countries; and 75% of those who remain intend to emigrate, as a result of the poor conditions for the development of health care workers. Care centers for older persons, whether temporary or permanent, are reportedly not sufficient, nor able to guarantee adequate conditions of care. According to public claims, the largest problem of these centers is the lack of financial resources and the lack of regular supply of food and medicines, which force many of them to either close their facilities or stop receiving new persons.

An additional concern refers to the weight loss among older persons in Venezuela. According to reliable research in the town of Miranda, older adults lost 1.3 kilograms per month thorough 2017, which further impacted on their health status and their adequate levels of nutrition. Likewise, many older persons are left alone, without emotional and

economic support, provided their relatives are forced to emigrate out of the country, as a survival strategy.

Given this situation, both Special Rapporteurs recall a statement by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights indicating that “older persons frequently face abuse, abandonment, neglect, ill-treatment and violence, and there are many obstacles in the realization of human rights”. Moreover, the International Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has stressed that “Older persons should have access to adequate food, water, shelter, clothing and health care through the provision of income, family and community support and self-help” and that “health policy to preserve the health of the elderly [*shall*] take a comprehensive view, ranging from prevention and rehabilitation to the care of the terminally ill.” In this connection, Francisco Eguiguren, IACHR Rapporteur for Venezuela, and Flávia Piovesan, IACHR Commissioner in charge of the Unit on the Rights of Older Persons, endorsed the present statement and called on the State to guarantee food security and the right to health of older persons, on the basis of equality and non-discrimination.

Considering above mentioned, the Special Rapporteurs urge the State to protect the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including mental health, of older persons in Venezuela, mobilizing the necessary and available resources to this end, including those of international cooperation. They finally refer to a request they made in August to the Venezuelan State for its acceptance of a joint visit to observe *in situ* progress and challenges in the realization of the right to health. To date, they continue to look forward to a reply. Within this context, the experts reiterate their profound interest in paying a visit to the country and offer their technical assistance to the State for the protection of the right to health.