

More can and needs to be done to fight old age poverty – UN expert urges Namibia

WINDHOEK / GENEVA (13 March 2017) – The United Nations Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Rosa Kornfeld-Matte, today commended the Namibian Government for “its political determination and vision on how to improve the lives of all Namibians by 2030 and to protect their human rights”, and “urged the Government to deliver on its promises.”

“I call on the Government to deploy every effort possible to finalize and put into motion the comprehensive national policy on the rights, care and protection of older people. A dedicated policy on older persons is key to ensuring improved protection of their rights,” the UN Expert said.



UN Independent Expert Rosa Kornfeld-Matte

She also emphasized that “any policy on older persons has to adopt a human rights-based approach,” and added that “the United Nations principles on older persons alongside the core human rights instruments should guide the Government’s efforts in this regard.”

“Ageing in Namibia is just beginning to take shape,” the UN Expert noted. While the proportion of older persons has remained somehow constant at around 7 per cent since independence, the projected growth rate of the older population in sub-Saharan Africa is expected to be faster than that experienced by any other region since

1950. “The challenges associated with an ageing society are not a distant phenomenon,” the UN expert emphasized. “It will result in immense pressure on the care system as a growing number of older persons will be living with chronic diseases and disability.”

“Low population density and accelerated levels of urbanization have the potential to erode the traditional family care system. Further investment by the Government in health and care infrastructure is required to provide alternatives to the older persons in rural areas.”

“Care can no longer be considered simply a family matter and I call on the Government

to step up its effort to revise the Aged Persons Act in order to fully provide for the rights, protection, care and welfare of older people.”

“Namibia has come a long way since it gained independence only 27 years ago. It has since enjoyed political stability and steady economic growth and is ranked as an upper middle-income country,” the Independent Expert said. “We owe recognition to these Namibian achievements,” she outlined.

Despite all the efforts, Namibia continues to be among the most unequal countries in the world. “While I acknowledge that poverty levels have been brought down significantly since independence, they remain high for certain parts of the population and certain regions of the country,” the Independent Expert said.

“I am also fully aware that some of the inequalities that persist are the legacy of colonial rule and that attitudes do not change overnight,” *she added*. “This does not mean that the existing disparities in income and land distribution are acceptable, and I have to insist that more can and needs to be done to fight old age poverty.”

“The launching of the Action Plan towards Prosperity for All, the so-called Harambee Prosperity Plan 2016/17 – 2019/20, has a great potential to foster enjoyment by older persons of their rights as it specifically refers to the social protection for older persons and addresses key areas such as hunger, poverty, and housing.”

“While the establishment and expansion of an extensive system of social grants is a significant achievement and example to follow, the universal non-contributory old age grant in many households constitutes the only income as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. I acknowledge the huge positive impact of the old age grant to reducing poverty levels, while it is important to ensure that earmarked assistance reaches its intended beneficiaries.”

“There are serious concerns about violence against, abuse and maltreatment of older persons and in particular older women in Namibia and there is too little discussion about it”. It is estimated that around 4 to 6 per cent of older persons have experienced some form of maltreatment at home. Poverty, inequality, substance abuse are contributing factors, but also entrenched attitudes including about corporal punishment. “The government has an obligation to tackle this as a matter of priority.”

“I would like to assure you that I heard your call for technical cooperation and capacity building. The international community has indeed an important role to play in complementing and supporting your efforts to address the challenges of an ageing society and in particular in the fight of old age poverty. I will do my utmost to encourage the international community to continue its cooperation with Namibia, including through financial and specific technical support.”

During her ten-day visit, Ms. Kornfeld-Matte visited Windhoek, Katutura, Okahandja, as well as Rundu, Silikunga, Zone and Mpungu in the Kavango Regions and met with various Government authorities, non-governmental organizations, the academia and others

working on the rights of older persons, as well as older persons themselves and their representative organizations.

The Independent Expert will present her findings and recommendations of her country visit in a report to the UN Human Rights Council in September 2017.

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Ms. Rosa Kornfeld-Matte (Chile) was appointed by Human Rights Council as the first Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons in May 2014. Ms. Kornfeld-Matte served as the National Director of the Chilean National Service of Ageing where she designed and implemented the National Policy of Ageing. She has a long career as an academic and is the founder of the programme for older persons at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Learn [more](#).

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