

# THE TORONTO DECLARATION

## on the Global Prevention of Elder Abuse



World Health Organization  
Geneva

# The Toronto Declaration on the Global Prevention of Elder Abuse



World Health Organization  
Geneva



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INPEA  
International Network  
for the Prevention  
of Elder Abuse

Abuse of older people has only recently been recognised as a global problem. INPEA's advocacy work and the emphasis given to elder abuse prevention by the World Health Organization have contributed significantly to raising awareness worldwide. Academic institutions, around the world, have also substantially contributed to enhancing understanding and raising awareness and have developed methodological tools to study the problem. However, much is still to be done.

On one hand more research is needed – for instance, along the lines of the seminal joint project “Global Response to Elder Abuse” which resulted in the publication “Missing Voices-Views of Older Persons on Elder Abuse” and on the other hand practical action at local, regional and national levels.

Twenty or thirty years ago, societies throughout the world denied the existence of violence against women and child abuse. Then, through research, came the evidence. As a result the civil society exercised the appropriate pressure for action from governments. The parallel with elder abuse is clear.

This declaration is a **Call for Action** aimed at the Prevention of Elder Abuse.

Points to be considered:

- Legal frameworks are missing. Cases of elder abuse, when identified are often not addressed for lack of proper legal instruments to respond and deal with them.
- Prevention of elder abuse requires the involvement of multiple sectors of society.
- Primary health care workers have a particularly important role to play as they deal with cases of elder abuse regularly –although they often fail to recognise them as such.
- Education and dissemination of information are vital – both in the formal sector (professional education) and through the media (combating the stigma, tackling the taboos and helping to de-stereotype older people).
- Elder abuse is a universal problem. Research conducted so far shows that it is prevalent in both the developed and the developing world. In both, the abuser is more often than not well known to the victim, and it is in the context of the family and/or the care unit that most of the abuse happens.

*“Elder Abuse is a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person”. It can be of various forms: physical, psychological/emotional, sexual, financial or simply reflect intentional or unintentional neglect.*

- A cultural perspective is mandatory in order to fully understand the phenomenon of elder abuse – i.e. the cultural context of any particular community in which it occurs.
- Equally important is to consider a gender perspective as the complex social constructs related to it help to identify the form of abuse inflicted by whom.
- In any society some population sub-groups are particularly vulnerable to elder abuse – such as the very old, those with limited functional capacity, women and the poor.
- Ultimately elder abuse will only be successfully prevented if a culture that nurtures intergenerational solidarity and rejects violence is developed.
- It is not enough to identify cases of elder abuse. All countries should develop the structures that will allow the provision of services (health, social, legal protection, police referral, etc) to appropriately respond and eventually prevent the problem.

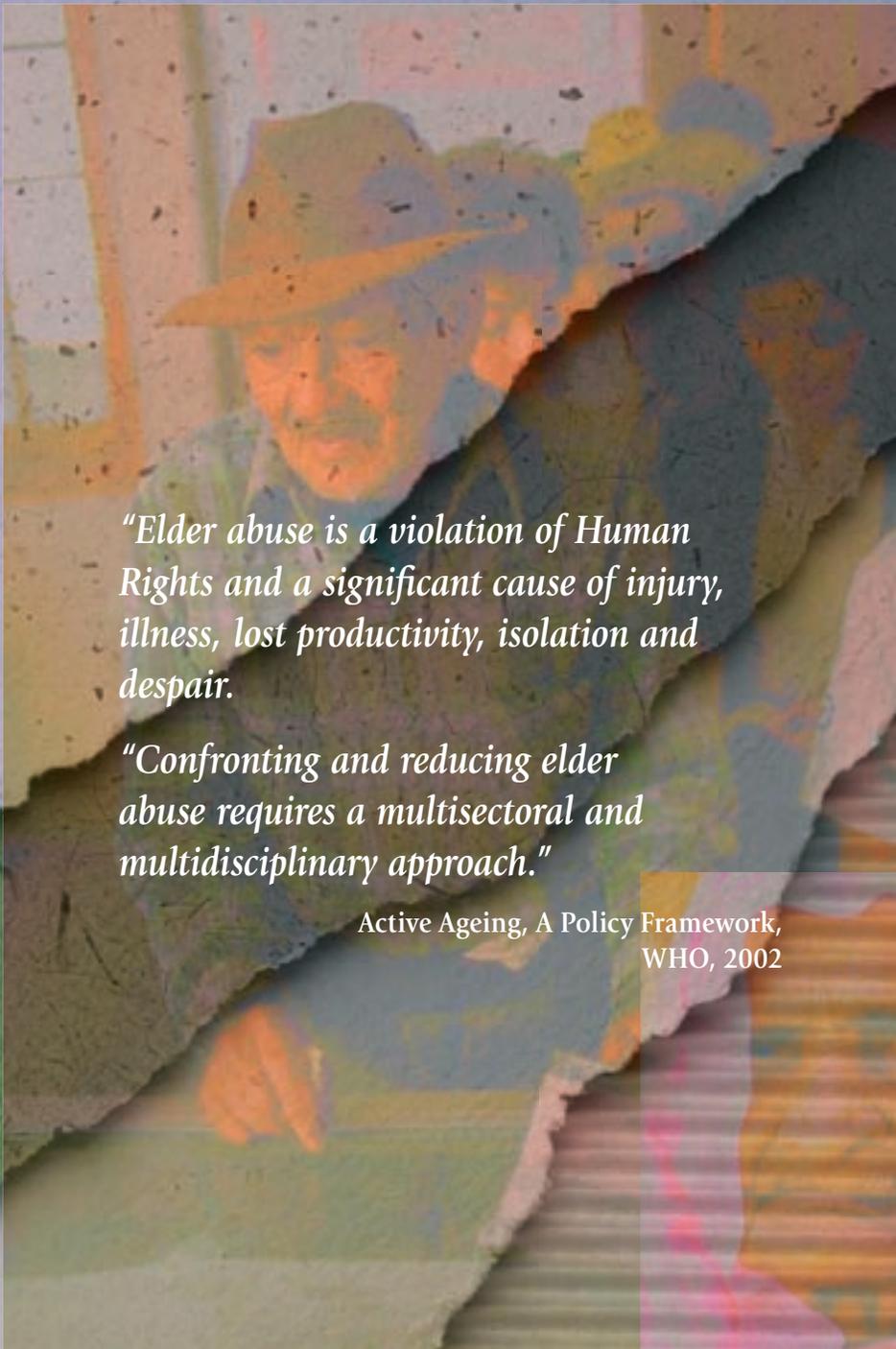
The United Nations International Plan of Action adopted by all countries in Madrid, April 2002, clearly recognises the importance of Elder Abuse and puts it in the framework of the Universal Human Rights. Preventing elder abuse in an ageing world is everybody's business.

*“In Ontario elder abuse will not be tolerated. That is why we are launching our comprehensive provincial strategy to combat elder abuse”.* Minister De Faria, Ontario's Minister Responsible for Seniors

This declaration was devised at an expert meeting, sponsored by the Ontario Government in Toronto, 17 November 2002

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More information at the following websites:  
[www.who.int/hpr/ageing](http://www.who.int/hpr/ageing), [www.inpea.net](http://www.inpea.net) and [www.onpea.org](http://www.onpea.org)



*"Elder abuse is a violation of Human Rights and a significant cause of injury, illness, lost productivity, isolation and despair."*

*"Confronting and reducing elder abuse requires a multisectoral and multidisciplinary approach."*

Active Ageing, A Policy Framework,  
WHO, 2002

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Ageing and Life Course  
Noncommunicable Disease Prevention and Health Promotion  
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World Health Organization  
E-mail: [activeageing@who.int](mailto:activeageing@who.int)  
Web site: [www.who.int/hpr/ageing](http://www.who.int/hpr/ageing)

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