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NGO in General Consultative Status
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Agenda item 3

Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development (Rights of Older Persons)

Oral Statement delivered by New Humanity of the Focolare Movement

Mr. President,

New Humanity welcomes the Independent Expert's report and, in particular, its recognition that cognitive impairment does not diminish personhood, human dignity or the continued capacity of older persons to shape their own lives.

We strongly support the report's relational understanding of autonomy. Autonomy should not be equated with complete independence. It can continue to be exercised through communication, relationships of trust and appropriate support. Words, gestures, emotions, behaviour and even silence may all express a person's will and preferences.

We would nevertheless highlight three areas requiring further attention.

First, relationships of support cannot depend solely on the goodwill and endurance of families and caregivers. States should provide them with practical training, psychological and financial support, and adequate respite services, so that care does not unintentionally become overprotection or isolation.

Second, hearing or visual impairments may sometimes be mistaken for cognitive decline. Appropriate sensory assessment and communication adjustments should therefore precede any conclusion concerning a person's decision-making abilities.

Finally, inclusion must go beyond access to services. Intergenerational initiatives, neighbourhood networks, volunteers and faith communities can create relationships of belonging and reciprocity. Older persons are not merely recipients of care: they continue to contribute through their experience, affection, memory and presence.

Human dignity is protected not only when a person is cared for, but when that person remains listened to, connected and recognised as a full member of the community.

Thank you.