

## **HARNESSING THE POWER OF GLOBAL AGING TO ADVANCE INCLUSIVE AND PRODUCTIVE FUTURES FOR ALL**

Declaration of Pontifical Academy for Life – AARP – Muslim Council of Elders

*Vatican City – May 10, 2025*

### **PREAMBLE**

Remarkable advances in science, technology, and public health have helped people around the world to live longer lives. The incredible leap in life expectancy over the past century is truly one of humanity's greatest achievements and is to be celebrated. And it is a worldwide phenomenon, with people in every region of the world gaining more years of life.

This remarkable achievement is happening alongside another global trend: steadily declining fertility rates. This too, is coming to every part of the world. Together, these two trends are leading to an increasingly rapid demographic shift toward older populations – in all parts of the world, and most rapidly in lower- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

The shift toward population aging has already arrived in many countries with advanced economies, such as Japan, Singapore, and Italy. But by 2050, a stunning 80 percent of the world's older people will live in LMICs – those countries whose economies are still developing – and where the shift toward older populations is happening much more rapidly. Today, Japan is the only country in the world where those aged 60 and older represent more than 30 percent of their population. By 2050, 62 countries will reach that milestone.

This global megatrend of population aging will have enormous social, economic, and cultural implications for all nations, presenting both a challenge and a tremendous opportunity, with appropriate planning and investment. The demographic shift will affect all of society and all of us. Therefore, people of all ages have a stake in planning for a prosperous future.

Older adults themselves are crucial members of families, communities, and society, serving as knowledge-keepers from a lifetime of living and experiences. Older adults are key drivers of the economy through their economic contributions. They perform critical roles in the community through their contributions as caregivers and volunteers, and other social engagements. They are our legacy and deserve to live their lives with both dignity and security, and they should be given the opportunity to continue to contribute as they age.

Much has been achieved by international organizations such as the United Nations and World Health Organization, among others, to raise awareness of the needs of the growing older populations around the world. Given the accelerated pace of global aging, this essential work must expand to acknowledge that although people have more years of living, those extra years of life are not all in good health. Improving healthy years of life (“healthy longevity”) helps individuals age well, fosters greater economic growth, and benefits all of society.

Among the many factors that impact healthy longevity and preserve the dignity of the individual, none is more important than brain health. Understanding the elements of brain health and advancing the best practices, policies, and lifestyle habits to promote brain-healthy behaviors across the life course is critical to ensuring that individuals can live independently and remain engaged and active in their families and communities.

Despite the incredible progress, more can be done to promote healthy aging and to protect the dignity of older individuals and their economic wellbeing when countries plan for their coming older populations. The scale of this demographic shift will necessitate both a recognition of the trends, a clear vision for the future, fresh innovation, sustaining partnerships, and global champions to leverage the full potential of global aging.

### ***Shared Vision***

The parties share a common vision: a world in which older adults can thrive, live with purpose and dignity, have meaningful connections, and be both healthy and financially secure.

This vision calls for stronger international cooperation – across international organizations, development banks, national and local governments, the private sector, philanthropy, and civil society – to support countries with growing older populations, by promoting innovation, leveraging the productive value of older persons, and ensuring that older adults, particularly those in vulnerable circumstances, receive the support and protection they deserve to contribute meaningfully.

This vision strives to inspire a greater recognition of the rapid demographic shift underway across all parts of the globe and the need to mobilize resources, exchange knowledge, and implement sustainable strategies to cultivate prosperous societies for all.

The undersigned parties hereby declare their firm desire and shared intentions to promote commitments that will advance the protection, inclusion, and empowerment of older populations across the globe.

The parties express their strong support for the following declarations of our values – related to older adults themselves, their families and their communities, and the institutions and ecosystems that support them.

## **I**

### ***Respect for the Dignity of Older Adults***

It is an unassailable principle that every older person possesses the right to dignity, autonomy, and full participation in society. Supporting the dignity of older adults entails a strong commitment to protecting their rights and preventing and addressing all forms of discrimination, abuse, exploitation, and neglect targeting older adults.

It includes enabling mechanisms that empower older adults to make choices that are right for themselves and their family. To the greatest extent possible, older persons should have access to high-quality, person-centered health, which are tailored to their individual needs and preferences.

Older adults should be able to live independently and securely within their communities, with access to affordable housing and appropriate care and support services in the community. The safeguarding of older persons' economic security, including the protection of income,

property, and financial autonomy, must also form a key priority, accompanied by policies that support informed and voluntary financial decision-making.

## **II**

### ***Supportive Role of Families and Communities***

Families and communities play a critical role in supporting older adults and they have shared moral and social responsibility to respect, protect, and promote the rights, dignity, wellbeing, and contributions of older persons. The parties believe that communities should support people of all ages, providing high quality of life for the very young, the very old, and everyone in between. Having communities that are age-inclusive enables all generations to live, work, and socialize together; as a result, individuals and their communities will be healthier, more vibrant and resilient.

The parties further express the conviction that age-inclusive communities enable older adults and their families, including family caregivers, to engage economically and socially in all aspects of society, from places of employment to recreational settings to living arrangements. Mechanisms should create options for older adults to continue working if they desire, facilitate living in the community as long as they choose, and create supports for family caregivers whose contributions are critical for the wellbeing of vulnerable older adults.

The perspective of older adults and their families should be reflected in the development of ageing policies and solutions and be given appropriate consideration alongside the perspective of academic and policy experts. With respect to individuals with age-related cognitive decline, including dementia, their perspectives and those of their families are critical to ensure solutions will meet their needs.

## **III**

### ***Duties of Institutions, Governments, and Societies***

The undersigned parties express the strong conviction that institutions, governments, and societies bear a moral and social obligation to promote the long-term prosperity and wellbeing of all people, of all ages. Global leaders and the legal norms that guide our societies should protect the rights and dignity of older adults and should promote their health and wellbeing to maximize their productive engagement. This requires actively fostering a legal, cultural, and institutional ecosystem that is designed for populations that are growing older and cultivates healthy ageing and the productive contribution of older adults.

To this end, the parties encourage global institutions to engage, guide, and support national policymakers to adopt policies and practices that better serve their aging populations to improve the wellbeing of all. Such policies and laws will empower older adults to exercise agency, participate socially, and contribute economically to society.

The undersigned express the hope that individuals, families, communities, civil society, the private sector, governments, and multilateral institutions will collectively plan to fulfill these responsibilities, guided by a renewed ethic of solidarity and care, and a recognition that planning for the coming demographic change will support greater prosperity and enable all to thrive.

## **Declaration of Action**

Pontifical Academy for Life – AARP – Muslim Council of Elders

The undersigned parties are determined to give practical effect to the values expressed in this Declaration.

The parties pledge to:

- **Actively support a world in which older persons live with purpose and dignity.** The parties pledge to take a person-centered approach, always engaging older persons themselves to inform our actions and recommendations. This approach acknowledges the significant and critical contributions of family caregivers and need to support them. The parties will continue to spotlight the need for world leaders to plan for the rapid shift toward larger older populations in every region of the world.
- **Actively support efforts to promote research, policies, and actions that will help older people live longer lives in good health.** Strategies include evaluating and scaling evidence-based interventions to reach communities, including those that have limited resources. Evaluations will include measuring and amplifying the economic gains from initiatives that support health and wellbeing for older persons as they age.
- **Actively support the development and financing of inclusive, locally led brain health strategies in all countries.** These strategies should include measurable targets for prevention, early diagnosis, equitable care, caregiver support, public education, and research infrastructure. This includes investing in population-wide and personalized prevention strategies, early detection of risk factors, and addressing the social and environmental determinants of brain health across the lifespan.
- **Actively combat ageism and age discrimination in all of its forms.** The parties pledge to reframe cultural attitudes to empower older adults. They also pledge to ensure the robust adoption and enforcement of legal protections against age discrimination. The parties further pledge to work with leaders in the private and public sectors to adopt policies and programs to reduce barriers to the participation of older adults in employment and other productive activities. They further express their readiness to contribute to actions that foster age inclusion, remove obstacles to participation, and strengthen protections against age discrimination and neglect.
- **Actively support and advance collective efforts to adopt an international legally binding instrument to protect the rights and dignity of older persons.** In this spirit, they will engage constructively with multilateral institutions, civil society, and relevant stakeholders to promote research and initiatives that will lead to concrete protections for older adults.
- **Express their support for the establishment of an international body or agency dedicated to advancing the goals expressed in this declaration.** This international agency should champion the full and active inclusion of older persons in cultural,

educational, economic, and public life. Moreover, the body should promote mechanisms and policies that help all members of society to maximize the opportunity of population aging, working with national governments, civil society organizations, and private stakeholders to strengthen national ageing policies.

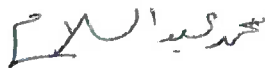
Through sustained collaboration, the parties reaffirm their shared responsibility to help lay the foundations for a global framework capable of advancing a new era where older adults everywhere can age well in thriving societies.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Vincent Paglin".

Pontifical Academy for Life

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Myranda".

AARP

A handwritten signature in Arabic script, likely belonging to a representative of the Muslim Council of Elders.

Muslim Council of Elders