

# Oral Statement from Fraternite Notre Dame

## 5th Working Session on Elderly Persons' Rights

United Nations Headquarters, New York City,  
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Fraternite Notre Dame, founded by His Excellency, Bishop Jean Marie Roger Kozik, comes to the help of any person, with no distinction of class, race, gender, creed, and most obviously, age.

This is how the religious Nuns, Friars and Priests of Fraternite Notre Dame are called to take care of elderly persons. In our day and age, much is said on human rights, but should we not rather be speaking of *duties*, and here in particular, duties towards the elderly.

There is one fact which cannot be denied nor avoided: each one of us, without exception, is gradually growing older, more or less properly. This is true in any given country or people, but modalities vary a great deal, according to each culture, as it reacts in front of this reality.

For a large number of people who live in industrialized and secular countries, growing old brings about its fears and load of uncertainty. Because today people want to ban old age, when the solitude of some elderly persons can be so deep that they die out and pass away with a broken heart in these lay societies; how comforting to see that there is, on the contrary, a number of societies in which most people are dynamic and enthusiastic until the end of their lives.

In past generations, the elderly were never excluded, as they fully belonged to the extended family, and entertained a network of mutual relationships that enriched younger generations. For instance, three or four generations would sometime live together under the same roof. There was no way to drive an elderly person away from the family. Juvenile delinquency was unknown. The elders would teach to the youth through oral traditions, and the latter paid them their respects. This intermingling of generations provided for mutual enriching: older persons found joy with the younger ones, and the youth found more balance and self control with their elders.

Fraternite Notre Dame, through its various activities with less fortunate children, had opportunities to assess what we have just said, by performing programs and educational outings for children, monitored by elderly persons

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In this case, benefits are mutual, for the children as well as for the elderly. In this our materialistic world, denying the spiritual dimension, when people are depressed, they are often told to “*take it easy*” and use tranquilizers; to the contrary, with our ancestors, those who “*felt low*” would usually react by increased activities and relationships with others. They were animated by a sense of sharing, exchanges and mutual aid.

In the soup kitchens of Fraternite Notre Dame, where free meals are served to the most destitute, testimonies from volunteer elderly persons have shown that their participation and service to benefit those that are more unfortunate, have helped them a great deal, at times leading them to rediscover a sense of purpose in their lives, and fostering their proper physical, moral and intellectual health.

Being retired should never mean being inactive or useless, but rather, rendering available to others one’s own gifts and abilities. Volunteerism is a cohesive factor when it comes to social relationship, and also an agent of peace.

Our modern society has lost these necessary values. Elders must fulfill their role which consists in handing down their values. Through their experience and know-how, they are in a position to testify to their initiatives, guide younger persons and warn them against errors. We must respect them and benefit from what they have earned.

For several decades, some men have worked strenuously in their will to destroy the family, which is our society’s basic unit. Destroying the family means destroying society itself. Everyone deplores it and suffers from it, but our sectarian legislators have done everything that they possibly could to utterly destroy the family: abortion, divorce by mutual assent and euthanasia.

Because elderly persons are now viewed as non productive and unwanted, there is little distance to cover when it comes to suppressing them, and it has been done. Democratic societies are supposed to protect their weakest members. What has happened with them?

We have a duty, which consists in taking care of, helping and surrounding the elderly with our affection in their illnesses and last moments. As the saying goes: *we shall be treated in the same way as we have treated our predecessors*. This proves to be true.

How can we suppress human beings who have given us life? Facing the rise of this culture of death, we want to emphasize that we, the Christians, must react with strength and courage, to uphold the values of family life, tolerance and mutual aid, and defeat evil through good.

[ *End of Fraternite Notre Dame’s Oral Statement* ]

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