



Statement on the International Day of Older Persons

October 1, 2014

The General Assembly of the United Nations designated October 1 as the International Day of Older Persons.

By designating a special day in recognition of seniors, the UN is drawing attention to the important contribution of seniors and to changing demographics: the greying of the population, or the "age of aging."

Unifor affirms a commitment to older persons and the essential contributions they make to our communities.

"It's vital to remember that older persons are the most vulnerable in society and are among the first to fall victim to the effects of a downturn in the economy and to the negative impact of increasing globalization," said Len Hope, Chairperson of the Unifor Retired Workers Council Executive and Unifor Executive Board member.

In Canada, many seniors are living in poverty and do not have adequate housing, care or access to health services. As well, the rate of poverty is particularly high among senior women. We also know that recent changes to Canada's retirement income system are of concern to many Canadians. The increase of the retirement age for the Old Age Security pension from 65 to 67 will start in 2023 and this will hit low income seniors the most. Those who work in physically demanding jobs and those with poor health will no longer have the option to retire at 65.

Meanwhile, those who rely on federally regulated defined benefit pension plans recently discovered that the federal government plans to introduce legislation to allow for those plans to be changed to the less secure target benefit plans. In a target benefit plan, retiree pension cheques can be cut. Many seniors' organisations have objected, insisting that employers have a responsibility to honour their pension promises. At the same time, they continue to pressure the federal government to improve retirement security for everyone by expanding the Canada Pension Plan. This is a policy decision that would benefit the next generation of workers the most and have little impact on today's seniors.

In the next federal election, Unifor will be urging all federal parties to develop and outline a plan of action that identifies independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment and retirement with dignity as central features of respect for older persons.

The International Day of Older Persons was observed for the first time throughout the world on October 1, 1991.