I wanted to say thank you for the insightful conversations this week.

At Amnesty International, my work focuses on the rights of older people in crisis and emergency situations.

In June, I traveled to Ukraine, where I interviewed over one hundred older people. I wanted to highlight some of their experiences, many of which underscore the points made here this week about gaps in existing protections for older people, who face numerous overlapping challenges that place them at heightened risk.

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Even before the war, 80% of older people in Ukraine received pensions that put them below the poverty line. The war, which has rendered many of them homeless, has made that poverty life-threatening. I spoke to older people who were living in houses without roofs or windows, because they could not pay for repairs or other accommodation. Pensions are lower for older women, who are more likely to live longer and to live alone.

Many older people in Ukraine also had disabilities. The support networks of friends, family, neighbours, or social workers that they relied on before the war were shattered. Older people, including those who had lived independently before the war, were at higher risk for institutionalization after losing their homes.

And finally, many older people faced a huge digital divide, in which they struggled to access information transmitted online about evacuation routes, support, or shelter.

It was painfully clear to me from these conversations that existing human rights mechanisms simply do not and cannot capture the intersecting and overlapping ways in which older people’s rights are violated in crisis.

Relying on existing treaty bodies will always be a half-measure that leaves us with a fragmented and inconsistent response to the rights of older persons. Only work toward a legally binding treaty dedicated to older people can guarantee the security of rights that so urgently need protecting.

Thank you