

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day
Remarks by
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I am delighted to be able to participate in this excellent recognition and celebration of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, the second since the UN designated June 15 as the Official Day.

As we know, the struggle to secure recognition of the **fact** of elder abuse was enormous, and no one must ever forget Rosalie Wolfe's tireless and burning efforts to do so. My first awareness of the movement was in Vancouver in 1998 or '99 at an IGA Conference, when Lia Daichman was talking about Rosalie and her work and efforts.

Look how far we have come – and look at how much we have yet to do—because this subject is **still** being mined: for understanding the vastness and complications of the problem and how difficult it will be to resolve it. But resolve it we **must** and we will. We **will** continue to publicize the issues, we **will** continue to locate and implement solutions, and we will **continue to** find more examples of abuse than even we ever thought of.

As we share our knowledge of this issue, and find out how various communities as well as governments are understanding and taking steps to mitigate and correct abuses, we cannot relax our efforts and outreach until and unless there is absolute acceptance that elder abuse must be dealt with in every sphere, with the means to locate and punish those who perpetrate the crimes. This must come from governments at all levels at the **core** -- and in concert with civil society. It is important and heartening to have some national and international governmental actions already in place.

But, as is frequently the case with good and thoughtful intentions and legislation, implementation is hard to come by. It is here that I believe that civil society, particularly at the local level –the **bottom-up, grass roots** level, can play a very important role. Actually, I believe that civil society **must** be a full partner with government in efforts to treat and even cure this terrible problem. And from personal and professional experience, I know that it can be done, --- with good will, political will and dedication to the betterment of our environments from all players, it can be done.

What are some of the ways we can pursue this evil and work to eradicate it? There are good faith programs that I am aware of already in existence, and you are probably aware of many more. Such as the New York City Asian Women's Program that

encompasses elder abuse cases along with the domestic abuse cases; there is the grassroots program in nearby New Jersey that has been seeking and finding shelters for elderly abuse victims – and which has so captivated the Bergen County government there that now it has the support of elected officials as well as Police and Fire Departments actively engaged; there is the special shelter and treatment program prototype at a nursing home in Riverdale that started this work many years ago. And the Financial Abuse Law that a local senior program in New York has devised just sent to the NY State legislature

So what is civil society's role -- on a much larger scale—working in concert with governments? I have several thoughts that have been rolling around in my head for a while and which I offer to you: they are surely not original with me, but since I have this opportunity on a platform, I will offer them. One deals with intergenerational relationships that start with family life, continues through schooling and extra-curricular life; in the workplace as well as the senior centers, via lifelong learning opportunities – you can fill in other openings.

What I am trying to understand is how can we bring a culture of interactive, intergenerational meaning into our lives. Not just between individuals and groups, but in terms of **civic courtesy** and understanding –**understanding** in terms of awareness that **all** of us share the space we live and work and play in. And **ALL** of us are ageing together!

Can we devise ways of inculcating a sense of **intergenerational civic courtesy** into our daily lives? Can we include dignity and respect for each other in our daily lives? I don't really know -- there are so many issues and events we are all dealing with all the time. You and I have to work on this!

The other idea I want to share with you has to do with spreading awareness and knowledge about elder abuse among those who take care of us from time to time—and even all of the time: Are our helpers, paid and unpaid, formal and informal, really tuned in to the variety and range and signs that are hallmarks of elder abuse.

In talking with the home care aide I have been working with since my accident, who comes from a reputable program, said NO when I asked if she had gotten any awareness training and/or information about elder abuse. Her answer was –no-. The same question to the hand therapist who visits gave me the same no. Shouldn't this be part of the training curriculum in home care? I could ask the same question in the hospital emergency room – I'm sure it is included for all, but is it reinforced? Judging from some

of the body language in the ER, it probably isn't. I don't believe this would be too difficult to look into and add to training.

Can this be your homework today? Please ask those you know and work with and play with, about elder abuse awareness and training in their lives and work.

I cannot close without acknowledging the tremendous pressures on governments and their rosters of civil servants at all levels, healthcare practitioners public and private, who serve us as well as being served. But it does **not** excuse **not** being aware and alert to abuse of persons, usually elderly, disabled and /or otherwise infirm, with regard to their financial situations or their being dehumanized in many ways, including so-called traditions in various societies.

And underlying this outrage of mine, and yours, is the knowledge that there are many social and political causes that foster and even enable some people to abuse other people.

We must always attend to issues of poverty and inequality that lead to the injustices we are concerned about. Elderly abuse is a major consequence of poverty, as is dislocation, uneven or no education, poor or non-existent health and mental health services – and the most dastardly of all – the wars that continue to plague us in this still new 21st Century.

We in civil society must find ways to work together better – **and** with governments – to create and make permanent --a more benign, respectful and accommodating society --
for all ages!!

Thank you.