

Steps towards an international convention on the rights of older people have been taken with the announcement by Latin American states that they will develop a regional convention.

The announcement was made during the 47th session of the UN Commission for Social Development (CSD) in New York in February.

The CSD also gave a mandate to the UN Department for Social and Economic Affairs (UNDESA) to explore mechanisms for strengthening implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) - for example, through the appointment of a special rapporteur on ageing or a convention or both. This process could therefore also eventually lead to an international convention.

While the adoption of MIPAA in 2002 marked a great step forward in recognising the need to include older people in social and economic development policies, MIPAA is not legally binding. The five-year review showed implementation to be patchy.

Recognising the need for better protection of older people's rights, Latin American states, at their regional MIPAA+5 review meeting in Brasilia in 2007, called for a special rapporteur on the rights of older people and the drafting of a convention.

A convention for Latin America and the Caribbean would not rule out the possibility of an international convention and could serve as a template for this.

Civil society organisations are showing increasing interest in a convention. "HelpAge International welcomes new human rights instruments that strengthen the implementation of MIPAA, including a special rapporteur and a convention," says Richard Blewitt, HelpAge International Chief Executive.

