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TIME TO RELEGATE AGEISM, SAYS NEW CAMPAIGN

On the eve of the last Labour Party Conference we are likely to see before a General Election, Age Concern launches a hard-hitting campaign today urging the Government to take firm action to defeat age discrimination.

The charity is calling on the Government to commit to establishing a Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) to promote and protect the rights of older people. Age Discrimination is still legal and its victims have no law or statutory body to protect them – in employment, in retail, in hospitals and GP surgeries.

This week, Age Concerns across the UK will join forces to encourage older people to use their voices to challenge everyday ageism. The campaign, backed by Sir Bobby Robson, invites older people to add their experiences to the first ever large-scale survey of ageism in the UK.

31 million people in the UK think Britain is ageist¹ and every day older people face discrimination:

As consumers - denied holiday insurance, credit and car insurance

As workers - forced out of the workplace because of unfair mandatory retirement ageⁱ

As students - student loans are not available for those over 54

As GP and hospital patients - invitations for breast screening stop coming when women are over 70 and more at risk.ⁱⁱ Services for older people continue to be rationed.

The charity is calling on the Government to:

- **Commit to introducing a Commission for Equality and Human Rights** in this year's Queen's Speech - this would give older people a body to battle for their rights. Bodies already exist to fight racism, disability and gender inequality.
- **Adopt legislation requiring all public bodies to tackle age equality** – in 2000, the government introduced a duty for all public bodies to promote race equality. This was widely deemed to be a success yet there are no plans to include age in future duties.
- **Outlaw unfair mandatory retirement ages** –people should be allowed to work for as long as they want or need to.

Gordon Lishman, Director General, Age Concern England said: *"Age is not a minority issue, it affects everyone, and yet ageism seems to be the last bastion of acceptable prejudice. Older people deserve better than the shoddy second-class treatment they often get from public services– we need laws to protect older people and a public body to champion their rights."*

¹ Age Concern/ICM research, December 2001.

Sir Bobby Robson, the former Newcastle United Manager asks older people to use their powerful voices to demand equal treatment.

Sir Bobby Robson said: *"Older people are a growing force by our sheer numbers and we must use our influence if we are to change attitudes. Age is irrelevant to what we can achieve in so many roles: as members of the community, as workers, as consumers, as carers, as grandparents. Yet many do not see this. We all need to speak out and challenge narrow views about age."*

Ends

Notes to editors

Age Concern has an ISDN Facility available, spokespeople and case studies.

* Older people who want to download an age discrimination survey should go to http://www.ace.org.uk/AgeConcern/news_2947.htm or telephone 08457 00 99 66.

* During Age Concern Week, Age Concern is calling on the nation's older people to:

- Vote with your feet – boycott companies with ageist practices and encourage your friends to do the same
- Write to your MP and demand fair policies
- Contact your local Age Concern for information and advice if you have been discriminated against because of your age

ⁱ 72% think fixed retirement age belongs in the past, source: Age Concern and ICM Poll, Choose not Lose, the Right to Work. July 2004.

ⁱⁱ Managers in NHS and Social Care organisations struggle to tackle age discrimination, source: Old Habits Die Hard: King's Fund, 2002. 77% of GPs said they were aware of age based rationing of services, source: Age Concern/NOP May 2000.