

## **Human Rights Council Session 41 - Oral Statement**

### **Widows Rights international**

This statement is endorsed by the Global Alliance of Last Women First – an alliance of over 100 organisations globally working for widows of all ages including ECOSOC accredited Guild of Service, Widows Rights International, Tandem Project (for WUNRN), and Global Fund for Widows.

Would you sit silent if you saw a woman evicted from her home, subjected to extreme physical violence, forced to remove her children from school and unable to feed, clothe, and address their ailments? Would you sit by and let her daughter be married as a child, and her sons recruited by extremists? Would you watch silently? We believe you would raise a voice in defense of this woman. So why is it that we remain silent when we watch over 300 million widows subjected to this daily horror? Yesterday was International Widows Day. Today can we not act to end the silence?

Widows face high levels of violence, are marginalized, are denied human rights. Their voice is seldom heard in national or international arenas.

Violence against widows, of all ages, includes abuse, harmful traditional practices, degrading mourning rites, stigmatization, rejection, economic, sexual and physical violence.

Widows endure disinheritance, property grabbing, and the denial of access to assets and resources that are rightfully theirs. They are often forced by their deceased husband's family to leave their home and property.

All these human rights violations result in many widows and their children, living in extreme poverty. They often are unable to have adequate housing, food, safe water, health care, education, and work skills.

Daughters of widows may well be forced, due to poverty, into child marriages, often to older men, increasing the child brides' chances of also becoming a young widow, and continue the cycle of poverty.

UNDP research in 2017 showed the tendency of sons of widows to join extremist movements, sometimes to provide for their poor widowed mothers.

This world has seen an exponential increase in widows and single women-headed families, due to conflicts, wars, climate crises, migration and immigration, diseases, and natural disasters.

Yet - support for widows can increase progress towards many of the Sustainable Development Goals as; *SDG1 eradication of poverty, SDG2 zero hunger, SDG3 good health and well-being, SDG4 quality education, SDG5 gender equality, SDG8 decent work and economic growth, SDG 10 reduced inequality, SDG11 sustainable cities and communities, and SDG 16 peace and justice in strong institutions.*

It is vital to increase awareness of discrimination against widows, the denial of their human rights, their challenges, their basic and poignant needs for themselves and their children.

Widows rights are human rights! We request that this Human Rights Council, Member States, UN entities and civil society, act today to make widowhood a human rights priority.