



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
20 November 2019

English only

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

9-20 March 2020

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Graduate Women International (GWI), Guild of Service, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Make Mothers Matter, National Alliance of Women’s Organizations, National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales, The Tandem Project, Widows for Peace through Democracy, and Widows Rights International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Statement

In adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States made a pledge to leave no one behind in their implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. This requires consistent international agreement and action. Widows and half-widows, whose husbands have disappeared, are consistently left behind.

For many people, a widow means someone of mature years – but in reality, many of the approximately 300 million widows worldwide are still children aged 10-13.

Millions of widows suffer poverty, abuse, neglect, and persecution – a “social death”. This excludes them from society, renders them invisible and unable to contribute to the economy, and means they are omitted from national statistics.

Commented [DWM1]: Where is the rest of this sentence?

Widows are affected by all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and have much to contribute. Given support, widows can raise the economic status of their immediate and wider societies, becoming active agents of positive change within their communities. Through our work with partners particularly in East Africa, we have found that with only small amounts of seed funding, widows have been able to start and run their own socioeconomic projects, which enabled them to feed, house, and clothe their children and send them to school; with an education, their children can break out of poverty. Elsewhere, similar projects have enabled widows to set up food shops, make jewellery, sell home-grown fruit, and export textiles. An entire community benefits if widows are given the support to

use their amazing skills and talents. They are net contributors to society and should not be viewed as a burden.

At a debate in the United Kingdom House of Lords on 19 June 2019, Baroness Sugg, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development, said that widows are often seen as passive victims whereas in fact they are “the backbone of their communities”. She added that we must ensure widows are not “trapped in a cage of poverty and stigma”. However, in order to be helped they need to be visible, which they currently are not.

Widows’ Rights International, together with the Global Alliance of widows’ organizations, and other entities working to promote widows’ rights, urge the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to work with civil society, especially in obtaining disaggregated data on the numbers and status of widows. We also seek the recognition of widows as actively contributing to their communities.

Further to the United Nations theme: “the future we want, the UN we need”. Reaffirming our collective commitment to multilateralism, we urge States parties to break the cycle of poverty by taking robust measures to enable and support widows. Widows and half-widows have lost their husbands, but should not lose their own lives. It is way past time to stop their invisibility.

Global Fund for Widows

Gray Panthers

Guild of Service

Mother's Union

National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales

The Tandem Project

Widows for Peace through Democracy

Graduate Women International (GWI)

International Federation of Business and Professional Women

Make Mothers Matter