



## 2013 INTERNATIONAL WIDOWS DAY

Twelve Years ago the first international widows conference was held at Friends' House in London, the headquarters of the Quaker religion, to raise international awareness of the plights of widows in Asia and Africa.

In a message to the conference from Gracia Michel patron of the organising charity, Empowering Widows in Development, she said "wherever they are irrespective of their religion and culture, a common feature of widowhood is violence perpetrated against them at the hands of near relatives and condoned by the inaction of governments".

Today, the work of organisations such as Widows Rights International and Widows for Peace and democracy as well as hundreds of organisations throughout the world, have resulted in a unprecedented wave of support for action to end this hitherto hidden injustice.

An example is of this is the UN sanctioned International Widows Day

(IWD), marked each year on 23 June since 2011. In this issue,

samples of the messages and events from around the world held to mark this special day for widows are published.

### Message from UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon



*Un secretary general Ban Ki Moon. Image taken from <http://archives.un.org/ARMS/content/ban-ki-moon>*

Ban Ki Moon commemorated the third International Widows Days by calling for "stronger action to end widespread discrimination against widows because no woman should lose her rights when she loses her husband."

He went on to highlight how "women and girls

continue to face gender-based violence and discrimination, and this is the case for many widows around the world."

He described the struggles widows face to inherit property and land rights and how they can be forced into exploitative and risky sex work to support themselves and their families.

He added that "an estimated 115 million widows are currently living in poverty, and 81 million have suffered physical abuse, some from members of their own family."

He stated that "it is our collective duty to ensure that widows of all ages

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and their children are treated as full and equal citizens, with equal opportunities for education, participation in the economy and decision-making, and a healthy life free of violence and discrimination."

Secretary General Ban Ki Moon also suggested that the protection and promotion of the rights of widows should be guided by the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

He concluded by stating "On this International Widows' Day, the UN salutes all governments, organizations and individuals working for justice and equality for widows, and for all women and men around the world."

Full statement available at: <http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=6925>

## UN Women Acting Head and Executive Director Lakshmi Puri IWD 2013 Message

In her message for International Widow's Day, UN Women Acting Head and Deputy Executive Director Lakshmi Puri, calls on the international community to adopt robust measures to end discrimination against widows so they can live in dignity and fully participate in society .

Ms. Puri also drew attention to the estimated 115 million widows currently living under the poverty line, and the 81 million who are subjected to physical abuse, often by their own family members. She underlined that widows are contributors to society as mothers, caregivers and heads of households and that their rights should be upheld by national laws and policies, guided by CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.



### Lakshmi Puri's Message

"We commemorate the third International Widows Day for the hundreds of millions of women in the world who suffer exploitation, deprivation and exclusion when their husbands die.

There are more widows than ever before due to armed conflict, the HIV/AIDS

pandemic, and the age difference between partners, with many girls being married off to much older men.

Today, we call for stronger action to end widespread discrimination against widows."

She added that "UN Women advocates for the empowerment of widows everywhere and supports this in Asia, Africa and Latin America. We work in partnership with widows' organizations so widows can live free of stigma and discrimination, with dignity, rights and economic independence, and have a voice in decisions that affect their lives in the household and the public sphere. This is part of our broader work to support women's economic empowerment, political leadership and participation, women's role in peace and security, ending violence against women and girls and gender responsive budgeting."

She ended by stating that "On this International Widows Day, UN Women calls for action to end discrimination against widows so they can live in dignity and enjoy equal rights, opportunities and full participation in society."

Statement cited at: [http://english.pravda.ru/history/23-06-2013/124912-rights\\_widows-0/](http://english.pravda.ru/history/23-06-2013/124912-rights_widows-0/)

Image taken from: <http://southasia.oneworld.net/news/lakshmi-puri-appointed-acting-head-of-un-women#.Udq>

## London based Charities support for IWD 2013

London based charity **Muslim Aid**, marked this years IWD by an expression of solidarity with organisations and institutions that provide help and support to widows and their dependants around the world.

A spokesperson at Muslim Aid said: "Helping widows and looking after their orphan children is not just an act of charity but also our civic duty and social responsibility. Empowering these women through education, skills development and micro-credit programmes enables them to take control of their lives and make informed decisions about their future. They need to be supported through housing, social care and employment opportunities to make up for the loss of their bread winners. It is also vital that they do not feel secluded from the society because of their unfortunate circumstances."



Muslim Aid's child support programme provides constant assistance to many widows in educating and nurturing their children.

In addition, the interest free credit given to widows through micro finance programme enables them to be self sufficient and live with dignity.

**The Loomba Foundation** was instrumental in establishing International Widows Day June 23, which has become a catalyst for the sharing of information about the state of widows in many countries. This year they organised a profile raising 5K charity walk to support the work of the Foundation in London's Hyde Park. Celebrities as well as other supporters of the campaign for widows rights participated.



The Foundation aims to "eradicate cultural discrimination against widows, lobby governments to give widows their due pensions and rightful inheritances, empower widows through employment opportunities and educate their children".

Full article available at

<http://www.muslimaid.org/index.php/media-centre/1068-international-widows-day>

Image taken from <http://www.muslimaid.org/ramadan-2012/case-study/asais-binti-abdullah>

## Organisations around the world mark IWD 2013

Various organisations from around the world used IWD 2013 to highlight the work that has been done and the work that is yet to be done to tackle the many issues related to widowhood. The following comprises of a collection of the types of work being done.

**The Peace and Collaborative Development Network**—a free professional networking site that works to foster dialogue and sharing of resources in international development, conflict resolution, gender mainstreaming, human rights, social entrepreneurship and related fields, issued a statement on IWD calling upon Governments, NGOs, INGOs, Academicians and the International agencies to:

- Collect statistics including quantitative and qualitative information, case studies and evidence of injustices to widows and formulating laws based on these evidence to protect vulnerable widows
- Ensure appropriate measure to support widows organizing themselves into self-help and empowerment group
- Include `widows` as a specific category in the National Action Plans for implementing SCRs 1325 and 1820 and the development agenda

- **Ensure that widowhood is mainstreamed into the MDGs as poverty; social attitudes and lack of economic independence make widow's targets of violence.**
- **Recommend that the CEDAW consider monitoring the status of widows on a country level basis and adopt a General Recommendation particularly on widowhood**
- **Allocate resources to enable widows' organizations and its network such as South Asian Network for Widows Empowerment in Development (SANWED) to ensure that the widows from the region are organized to raise a stronger collective voice**
- **Ensure meaningful representation of widows in the peace process and legal reforms, including constitutional reform and law committees**
- **Commission a United Nations Report on Widowhood in Conflict.**

*The full statement can be found*

*at:* [http://www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org/forum/topics/statement-on-the-occasion-of-un-recognized-3rd-international?xg\\_source=activity#.Udq0XTxGyZ](http://www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org/forum/topics/statement-on-the-occasion-of-un-recognized-3rd-international?xg_source=activity#.Udq0XTxGyZ)

**Gospel for Asia (GFA) is a mission organization based in Carrollton, Texas, and marked the day by arranging celebrations of hope, gifts, training and compassion services.**



Image: [www.gosanangelo.com](http://www.gosanangelo.com)

**Gospel for Asia's ongoing ministries include care for widows with leprosy and the "tiger widows," those living in West Bengal, home to India's largest Tiger Reserve and**

**National Park.**

**Special meals and worship services were planned and in some areas widows will receive piglets as a source of income, and in another, saris will be distributed.**

**Products such as sewing machines and small animals restore income, hope and dignity. GFA has inaugurated several centres where widows receive shelter,**

**food, clothing, medical care, literacy training and home industry skills. Gifts will support these ministries and enable expansion of eight additional centres.**

*The full article can be found at:*

<http://news.iskcon.com/node/5179>

**Women for Human Rights, Single Women Group, held a campaign to mark International Widows' Day in Kathmandu, Nepal.**



*Supporter pauses to contribute to the campaign banner in Katmandu.*

**Riddhibaba Pradhan, Nepal Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare "expressed hope that the recently passed widows' regulation will help uplift the financial status of widows." She attributed the lack of jobs available to widows as contributing to their further suffering in the area.**

**Nepal celebrated the day with a slogan 'Respect widows and ensure their security.'**

*Image and article available at:*

<http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Empower+widows%3A+Minister&NewsID=381231>

**The dire plight of Kenya's widows was highlighted in an online article for Nairobi newspaper The Star which was cited on the AllAfrica website. Writer Maxwell Masava describes how 2013's IWD "was celebrated with local activists calling on Kenyans to 'be kind to a widow because their plight worldwide is dire'".**

**The days events were arranged by the Rona Foundation (Relationships. Opportunities. Networking. Advocacy).**

**Despite lack of funding for Rona's loss and grief project in Kenya, the organisation said they reached out to vast number of people via forums, raising**

awareness and support systems, and creation of loss and grief centres for orphan and widow support.

The article highlights how widows are often robbed of their inheritance and/or land, personal belongings and in some cases their children are taken away from them.

*The full article is available at:*

<http://allafrica.com/stories/201306270101.html>

## Progress: Africa fights for widows rights

All over Africa, organisations supporting widows' rights have been established. Ministries for Women's Affairs have now taken on board the need to include widows and their children in their work to include action against the cultural practices which are at the root of the persecution of widows.

Earlier this year, CNN carried a feature which highlighted the work of Seodi White, head of the Malawian Chapter of Women and Law in Southern Africa. Seodi attended the London conference in February 2011 and has remained an active supporter of the international campaign to protect the rights of women and girls as well as widows in her country and Africa in general.

As she travels around Malawi, she battles against inequality, promotes education and works to stop young girls from giving up education in order to



marry in their early teens.

She has also campaigned tirelessly against

those traditional practices that harm older, vulnerable women in her country, and she has highlighted such practices as "widow cleansing" which requires a widow to have sexual relations in order to be cleansed, so as to ensure

that the spirit of her dead husband will not return to haunt her, and curse herself and her family.

This practice is so deep-rooted that even widows support it, as they are afraid of the curse, but in reality, this has led to the spread of HIV-AIDS. It has now been reported that there are professional "cleansers" in villages, with men charging widows up to \$50 for their services, in a country where the minimum wage is less than \$1 per day.

Seodi is continuing a decade's long fight against the dispossession of land and property by the families of widows, leaving them and their children homeless. Her organisations has fought for more than 10 years to advance the right of women to keep their marital estate and has called for a reform of the country's inheritance laws. The campaign, which met with strong resistance, was successful in 2011 when the country's parliament voted to make property grabbing an offence and to protect the rightful share of the estate for the widow and her children.

*For the full interview*

see: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/21/world/africa/seodi-white-women-malawi>

Another country where there has been a tremendous increase in the success of activities to help widows is Cameroon. The London Guardian newspaper carried a major article on a project described as "trying to turn around 500-year old traditions".

Written by the well-known Nigerian writer Bimi Adewunmi, the article on Tuesday 2 July, described how with the support of the King Fiekemshi II, the Fon (king) of Baba1, a semi-autonomous district in the north, a widowhood project succeeded.

The project was started because of the tremendous rise in the discrimination against HIV/AIDS sufferers in the mid to late 1990's and it has worked in three phases. The first involves consultations with villagers followed by

binding agreements to recognise the rights of widows drawn up between advocates and the Fon.

The Fon stated that "If I hadn't been interested, it would still be the way it was," he says. "What we are trying to do is come out of the old ... This is a culture that needs to be wiped out, and in this village, its changing fast."



The projects have now been introduced to five other fondons, reaching approximately 8,000 widows. Supporters of the project include Voluntary Service

Overseas (VSO), and local charity the Muslim Students' Association of Bamenda (MUSAB). Encouraged by the progress in five fondons VSO has extended it to start up a livelihood project – a corn meal grinding business in Baba1 with all profits going towards supporting widows in the community.

Neem trees have been planted to mark IWD 2013 and these will grow to shelter villagers from the sun.

*For the full article and images see:*

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2013/jul/01/widows-cameroon-free-lives-project>

In Nigeria, the Imo First Lady of Imo State called for an end to the obnoxious practices of widowhood. She appealed to all traditional rulers and community opinion leaders in the state to use their influence to end the persecution of widows.

Madame Nneoma Nkechi Rochas Okorocho also works tirelessly to encourage

all communities to curb the use of all harmful widowhood practices. She ap

peal to them as custodians of the regions' culture when she spoke at a forum organized for widows drawn from the 27 Local Government Areas of the State in the capital Owerri,.

Madam Okorocho noted that though tough legislation has been put in place to check the obnoxious practices, in some areas widows are still subjected to many de-humanising acts.



She implored the audience to comfort, encourage and support widows at all times as they were "exposed to psychological tor-

ture arising from the death of their husbands rather than being harassed, intimidated, humiliated and dehumanized."

Another speaker, the Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development, Lady Anne Dozie said that intensified efforts are being made to "sensitize people on the need to respect the rights of the widows and treat them with due human respect". She added that several widowhood cases have been amicably handled and resolved by her Ministry.

Other speakers identified the fact that ignorance on the part of women was a constraint on success in the campaign against these harmful widowhood practices and "called on the government and faith based organizations to carry the campaign to the rural areas".

Full article available at: [http://imofirstlady.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=39:imo-first-lady-calls](http://imofirstlady.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=39:imo-first-lady-calls)

Image taken from: <http://www.imostateblog.com/2013/06/10/imo-first-lady-nneoma-nkechi-rochas-okorocho-flags-off-free-cancer-screening/>

## PARTNER CHARITY; WIDOWS AND ORPHANS MOVEMENT (WOM), GHANA, ANNUAL REPORT 2012

In the annual report of the Widows and Orphans Movement based in Bolgatanga, northern Ghana, the Director Betty Ayagiba writes about the wide-ranging projects which have been completed in partnership with many international agencies. There are a number of activities designed to help widows overcome widowhood rites and cultural practices. The charity recognises its strengths in working at grass roots level, with a very good and strong relationship with the Chiefs, Tindanas, women leaders and young people. In 2013, WOM plans to collaborate more with Chiefs, the newly installed Queen Mothers and other organizations who are fighting for the same cause.



WOMs current programmes cover education about human and women's rights, HIV/AIDs, education for orphans, as well as income generating activities such as shea butter processing, pomade products, craft, farming, micro credit and a new project on Unpaid Care.

Picture showing widows being trained on Baobab products.

The following are examples of the work this sister charity is now engaged in which includes:

**Training on Baobab Products** The Upper East Region is rich in wild Baobab trees. WOM was invited to Tamale for a workshop organized by Tree Aid on how these timber trees can be used to generate income by learning how to produce biscuits, syrup and baobab drinks. Forty-three participants from the three Northern Regions have now been trained.

**Training of 20 widows in basket weaving** WOM has been working for the past ten years with the National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI), a non-profit public sector organisation under the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Presidential Special Initiatives and came into being in 1985. NBSSI has its Head Office in Accra, secretariats in all the regional capitals and Business Advisory Centres (BACs) in one hundred and ten (110) district capitals. Services offered by the NBSSI include business development for micro and small enterprises. This year three widows groups were trained by NBSSI in basket weaving, packaging of Shea butter and training on Micro Credit. Below is the style of basket the widows were trained to weave.



Picture showing a widow carrying the basket she was trained to weave.

All programs, partnerships and project are detailed in the full annual report 2012 available at; [http://www.paul-ev.org/2012\\_Womghana\\_report.pdf](http://www.paul-ev.org/2012_Womghana_report.pdf)

## AWARD FOR PARTNER CHARITY

Dr Eleanor Nwadinobi, who heads Widows in Development Organisation (WiDO) based in Eastern Nigeria is a member of to the Centre for the Eradication of Violence Against Women - CEVAW based in Enugu, Nigeria which brings together researchers activists, pro bono lawyers.



Image taken from:

<http://www.usnepalonline.com/usa/nepal-to-new-york-single-women-voice-being-heard.html>

As a result her work in Nigeria and at the UN , Dr Nwadinobi has been awarded one of the Humanitarian Awards presented annually by New York Nation to Nation Networking non-profit and non-partisan organization with a mission to build bridges across cultures, and to foster a broader understanding among the peoples of all nations.

In conjunction with the 57th UN CSW the award was presented to Dr. Nwadinobi, who is also Finance Chair of the Medical Women's International Association for her service to women and widows, by Abaynesh Asrat, Founder and President, Nation to Nation Networking Ltd on the 6th of MARCH 2013.

More details about the work of Nation to Nation Networking can be found at; <http://ntonnetworking.com/>

## CAN YOU HELP?

**Message from the Chair,**

**WRI is seeking to build a network of widows organisations as well as a data-base of rulings made in the justice system which deals with the rights of widows and their children to inherit property , land and other assets, including pensions. Any other judgements directly linked to the human rights of widows would also be welcomed.**

**This network and database could become an invaluable source of case law precedents and would be freely accessible.**

**WRI welcome any contact, suggestions and information from/about individuals and organisations working in this field. Please contact us at:**

**[administrator@widowsrights.org](mailto:administrator@widowsrights.org)**



**Patsy Robertson,  
Chair, WRI**



## ABOUT WRI

**Widows' Rights International supports organisations in sub-Saharan Africa working for social justice and human rights for widows including:**

- ◆ Right to keep their home and property
- ◆ Right to inheritance and land ownership and possession
- ◆ Right to keep their children
- ◆ Right not to be forcibly married to the dead husband's kin
- ◆ Right to work outside the home

### PLEASE SUPPORT OUR WORK!

Go to [www.widowsrights.org](http://www.widowsrights.org) and press the button to help us help these disadvantaged women in their struggle for their basic human rights.



### WRI works:

- ◆ to promote the recognition of widows' special vulnerability
- ◆ to combat negative social attitudes which lead to their isolation, exploitation and poverty
- ◆ to bring these practices to an end:

### WRI mobilises action by:

- ◆ International organisations
- ◆ National governments
- ◆ Legal and other civil society organisations

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