



Join us in taking action to support widows worldwide on Widows Day 2021

Covid19 is the world's widow maker. Building forward transformatively from Covid means supporting marginalized, 'invisible' and stigmatized widows of all ages to combat poverty, disease and fight for their rights.

Widows matter – but are made invisible by stigma, shame and the systematic failure of government and the international community to take notice of their rights and needs. Widowhood is a driver of intergenerational poverty and destitution. Estimates from 2015 are that there are approximately 258 million widows and 'half-widows' (wives of the missing or forcibly disappeared) in the world today. This is a conservative number, as data on widows is not routinely collected, widow numbers are increasing due to worldwide conflicts and violent extremism, and because of Covid 19, which kills more men than women.

Widows of all ages worldwide suffer stigma and abuse through being disinherited, socially shamed, subjected to horrific traditional practices, denied access to justice, and excluded from social protection and access to essential services. Without economic and social security widows resort to begging and prostitution, with their children made to work, being taken out of education and subject to early or enforced marriage. There are 1.5 million child widows – without education, married early and frequently mothers themselves. Covid 19 restrictions perpetuate their poverty as making a living in the informal economy is even more difficult.

Widows for Peace through Democracy (WPD) and its network of partners call for immediate action on these issues to progress the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and realise the rights of women. WPD's 2020 Dossier, 'WIDOWS SPEAK OUT - Abuse and Discrimination, Resilience and Agency - a dossier of evidence for the attention of CEDAW', downloadable from <https://www.widowsforpeace.org/widows-speak-out-cedaw-2020/>, for the first time reveals the lived experiences of widows through detailed case studies from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Iraq, Kenya, Kosovo, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and Pakistan, within a context of current evidence from leading international experts and NGOs. The dossier, to be regularly updated, provides compelling evidence for governments, charities, local organisations and UN agencies to prioritise the rights and needs of widows and to take substantive action to legislate for and enforce their rights.

WPD with its network of partners organisations will continue to submit formal evidence on specific incidents of violation of widows' rights to national governments and UN mechanisms that monitor violations of womens rights. WPD is calling for greater attention to widowhood, to challenge discrimination and break down the walls of silence and invisibility surrounding widowhood. We are calling for global research on widowhood, a UN Independent Expert on Widows and a CEDAW General Recommendation on Widows.

Our website <https://www.widowsforpeace.org/> gives details of our work and we invite all to support our efforts in securing a life for widows everywhere of empowerment, equality and peace.

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Signatories: