



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-sixth session

14–25 March 2022

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 Global Fund for Widows, Graduate Women International (GWI), Mother’s Union, National Alliance of Women’s Organizations, National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales, National Council of Women of Canada, Wales Assembly of Women, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Widows are a huge demographic, living across the globe, in all cultures and countries, and due to child marriage, of all ages. From a 16 year old widow with two children to a 90 plus widow, women and girls the world over are more vulnerable if they are widows. As data is not usually sought on marital status, there is no solid data on how many widows there are across the globe. Research undertaken by the Loomba Foundation in 2015 posits a figure of over 280 million widows. Some organisations working with widows take the view that this is an underestimate. Bearing in mind the results of COVID 19, it is highly likely that there are more widows now, both directly from the disease, but also from the migrations that have taken place. Conditions of widows in relation to CEDAW articles have been recently documented by Widows for Peace through Democracy. With such a high number of widows, experiencing abuse and discrimination, living in every country of the world, and spanning all ages – why are they so absent from UN documents, policies and programmes?

Widows Rights International, along with its sister signatory organisations, and the umbrella coalition – the Last Woman First – urges the Commission to include the perspectives of widows in all their deliberations.

Climate change and conflict, disproportionately affect widows as they are most often the most vulnerable, often being disinherited of any land, goods or chattels as a result of their husband dying. Yet their resilience is a lesson in how to survive and thrive, given the smallest assistance – as can be seen from the example of Naserian, Tanzania and Women of Purpose, Uganda.

The COVID 19 pandemic provided ample examples of how the world of work can change and become more flexible. In light of this learning, surely it is timely to consider different ways of engaging women and girls in decent work, including widows. Child widows are an especial example of multiple discrimination: they have lost their freedom at an early age; they lose their childhood; they often suffer at the hands of an older husband; when their husband dies, they find themselves with children but without education or training and unable to find work, especially where they can also look after their children. Technology can assist widows to work from home.

The response to the COVID 19 pandemic has proved that where there is political will no problem is without solutions. Surely it is time now for Member States to prove their political will in this area and make robust provision for widows of all ages and all countries.

We request the Commission to work with all stakeholders to:

- Agree a Special Rapporteur for Widows;
- Put in place a CEDAW General Recommendation supporting widows;
- Ensure the provision of disaggregated data by marital status;
- Ensure that the contribution of widows, and a commitment to tackle the specific discriminations they experience, is included in the Agreed Conclusions of CSW66.

Widows and organisations working with widows, young and old, across the globe, are tired of being forgotten. The Commission must take on its mandate with renewed vigour, especially when the significant anniversary to highlight the elements of the Beijing Platform for Action, was diminished due to COVID. Now is the time to ensure widow-inclusive language is included in all relevant UN entity documents. Now is the time to highlight the many and varied achievements of widows despite continuing hardships. Now is the time to support widows to continue to work within their communities to build a better world: peace, prosperity and justice for all.