

THE KATHMANDU WIDOWS DECLARATION
International Conference on Widowhood
"Widows' Voices Empowered"
24-25, June 2010, Kathmandu, Nepal

Women for Human Rights, single women group, organized "International Conference on Widows: Widows Voices Empowered on 24th - 25th June 2010 in Kathmandu, Nepal. Altogether 200 participants from single women group of various districts of Nepal as well as International Participants from Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Germany, India, Italy, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, United States of America and United Kingdom participated in the conference.

The Kathmandu Widows Declaration is an advocacy tool created by organizations working for the rights of widows, with the help of civil society organizations and UN agencies, based on the Model Charter for the Rights of Widows, Draft Protocol for adaptation to specific country, legal, social, cultural, economic situation developed by Widows for Peace through Democracy in 2005. It aims to raise greater awareness at the government level in order to address the needs of and provide support to widows in the region. This declaration should be adapted where appropriate, to reflect the particular country's legal, social, cultural, economic and political situations in responding to the needs of widows.

Discrimination against and abuse of widows of all ages and single women in general, transcends differences such as geographical location, culture, religion, and ethnic identity, and occurs irrespective of their economic or education status, class or caste.

There are several international policies aiming to protect the rights of widows, including those agreed by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the consensus on the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), in the widespread support for the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and the endorsement by governments of Security Council Resolution 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889. However, in the strategies and policies, which are intended to raise the status of the world's women in general, widows remain invisible.

Widows are often the sole supporters of families and play an important role in bringing about development, peace and justice in their countries. Widows are often discriminated against on the basis of cultures, traditions and religions, and many of these practices are oppressive and abusive to the widows. Widows are also more vulnerable to other dangers in society, such as HIV and AIDS. It is time to address the discrimination widows' face in society.

The Kathmandu Widows Declaration demands:

- The elimination of all discrimination against widows, in family, community and public life;
- The acknowledgement and adequate support for their social and economic roles;
- The right for all widows to access justice to empower them to remedy the wrongs they have experienced and;
- The criminalization of all actions that deny widows' their fundamental rights.

This declaration supports the Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889, which have paved the way for implementing women's rightful roles in all aspects of conflict resolution, prevention and peace-building. National action plans for the implementation of these resolutions must address widows' issues specifically, as they suffer in particular ways as the result of conflict. We say "no widows, no peace". It is imperative that widows' voices are heard at peace tables, and that widows' rights are firmly embedded in new constitutions and law reforms as a matter of priority. It is governments that must demand the UN to take up these rights, and we urge widows' organizations from across the region to use this declaration to lobby their governments on this issue.

This declaration notes that:

- All women are equal and that the human rights of women are inalienable, universal and non-transferable.
- In many countries widows suffer from low status, discrimination, violence and lack of legal rights.
- In many communities, social attitudes towards widowhood obstruct widows from fully participating in civil society.
- In spite of international and domestic laws guaranteeing equality in inheritance, land ownerships, and criminalizing violence against women, widows are often banned from inheriting property, evicted from their homes, and left in a state of destitution.
- Widows, in the context of the Aids pandemic, suffer stigma and abuse, have special healthcare needs.
- Widows are often primary or sole care-givers of children, orphans and other dependents.
- Widows are key social and economic players in development. Widows play an important role in the resolution and prevention of conflict.
- Many conflict affected widows face rape, forced prostitution, trafficking and sexual harassment.
- Young widows often face discrimination within the household and in their work places, including sexual and psychological violence.
- The lack of rights and the prevalence of harmful traditional practices frequently have disastrous consequences for both widows and their children, most notably their daughters, who are at risk of economic and sexual exploitation.
- In spite of international and national legislation to eliminate discrimination against women, widows' lives, being mostly determined by discriminatory interpretations of custom or religion, have not benefited from these laws.

This declaration strongly urges respective South Asian Governments:

- To ensure that widows have easy, rapid and affordable access to justice at all levels. We urge them to provide conducive environment by:
 - Removing all forms of discrimination against widows (single women) and their families, including harmful traditional practices;
 - Providing them with full rights to ownerships of land and inheritance and
 - Ensuring they are entitled to equal rights to social support and financial benefits.
- To recognize National Network(s) of widows, and their existent groups in towns, villages, refugee and IDP camps.
- To acquire from afore-mentioned National Network(s) information on the needs of widows for any policy making at the national and local level.

- To support and provide resources (including funding) for widows' associations in order to facilitate their mapping and profiling of authentic data of widows in their respective countries.
- To facilitate networking of widows' organizations within and between countries, and to support regional gatherings of South Asian Network for Widows Empowerment in Development (SANWED) in order for them to share best practices and advocate for policies and programs that may improve the status of widowhood and benefit widows and their children.
- To ensure that each nation adopt - or where appropriate adapt - and implement the Widows Charter- WPD Model Charter, which identifies the human rights of widows.

This declaration urges all SAARC governments to put together a National Policy on widowhood in consultation with the local widows' groups and networks and also add the issue of widows in the SAARC forum.

This declaration urges the International Organizations, UN Agencies and the Human Rights Commission:

- To devise flexible funding policies to support widows' "banding together" in order that they may:
 - Develop a collective voice,
 - Articulate their needs,
 - Proclaim the crucial nature of their roles in their communities
 - Be represented in decision making, in peace building negotiation and in committees for constitutional and law reform.
- To ensure that widowhood issues are mainstreamed into all international and regional policy dialogue in order to be effective in implementing the Beijing PFA, the MDGs, the UNSCR 1325, 1820, 1889 and 1890.

This declaration urges that all national action plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions on the advancement of women should include "widows" as a specific category. And the status of widows in post-conflict environments should be included as a "global indicator" to evaluate implementation.

This declaration urges to that the UN Secretary General appoints a UN Special Rapporteur on widowhood and that the UNSG commissions a Special Report on Widowhood in Conflict and Post-Conflict countries.

This declaration urges that the new Gender Entity at the UN ensures that the issues of widowhood are given top priority at the international level, country level and field level.

This declaration urges that CEDAW committee expedites the development of a "General Recommendation" to state parties in order to identify and address the status of widows in their own countries. Additionally the CEDAW committee considers the development of a questionnaire to state parties concerning numbers, ages, life -styles, economic and health status of widows with particular reference to rights in the areas of inheritance, property, remarriage, harmful traditional practices, physical and sexual violence and stigma due to HIV and AIDS.

Place: Kathmandu, Nepal

Date: 25th of June, 2010

Signature of the Participants:

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References:

Participants' views and suggestions during International Conference on Widows- Widows Voices Empowered -2010

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This Declaration is based on CSW Recommendation, 2010 and documents prepared by Margaret Owen, Director of Widows for Peace through Democracy (WPD)



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