



**Global Fund for Widows**

# International Widow's Day: Invisible No More

Virtual Event Summary Report

Clara Driey

June 2021

**International Widows' Day: Invisible No More**

Wednesday, 23 June 2021, 9:00am EST

**Hosted by:**

The Global Fund for Widows

**Moderated by:**

Heather Ibrahim-Leathers

*President and Founder – Global Fund for Widows*

**Panelists:**

H.E. Ambassador Abdou Abarry

*Permanent Representative of the Republic of Niger to the United Nations*

H.E. Ambassador Victoria Sulimani

*Deputy Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations*

Ms. Anita Bhatia

*Deputy Executive Director, UN Women*

Ms. Ritu Chhabria

Trustee, Mukul Madhav Foundation

Ms. Kulsum Shadab Wahab

Executive Director, Hothur Foundation

Professor Ousseina D. Alidou

Faculty Director, Rutgers University Center for Women's Global Leadership

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**As the international community enters its second decade of acknowledging these women and their rights, the Global Fund for Widows (GFW), convened a panel of expert policy-makers and practitioners for a discussion on “Invisible No More,” to mark International Widows’ day and discuss the turning tide the issue of widowhood has experienced in the past several years, including recognition by impactful actors in the international space, and celebrating a growing movement for widows and their rights.**

### **Increasing Widows’ Visibility at All Levels of Policymaking**

Delivering the keynote address, Ambassador Abdou Abarry, Permanent Representative of Niger to the UN, discussed the importance for the UN to address this social and human rights matter. Widows and orphans are among the most vulnerable groups in conflict-affected areas, said Ambassador Abarry, who explained how in the Sahel region the security situation has worsened since 2011. Soldiers dying in conflict often leave behind widows or orphans, and he emphasized that the support of widows is critical and asked for their voices to be considered at the national, regional, and international levels. He advocated that rapid and early support for widows and orphans is essential to mitigate the precarity that follows the loss of their loved ones. Later in the discussion, Professor Ousseina D. Alidou of Rutgers University shared some of her research on widows in peace and security. She emphasized the necessity of bringing visibility to widows all over the world, especially in the Global South and at the UN, as wars continue to generate a population of young women who face a lifetime in widowhood. She urged that this visibility must include regulation, policy, and implementation.

### **Resolution on Widowhood to the United Nations General Assembly**

To amplify the voices of widows and make sure they get the attention they deserve, Ambassador Victoria Sulimani, Deputy Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the UN, announced that Sierra Leone will table a Resolution on Widowhood to the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee this fall. As Sierra Leone continues its recovery from a conflict that created a high number of widows, Ambassador Sulimani recalled that her country has witnessed the catastrophic consequences of widowhood on women and children, including extremist indoctrination and child marriage. She celebrated the fact that widows are no longer invisible in the UN space and emphasized that when widows thrive their communities do too.

### **Empowering Widows to Thrive through Dignified Work and Rights Education**

As Trustee of Mukul Madhav Foundation (MMF), Ms. Ritu Chabbria provided a powerful account of her experience working with more than 400 widows in India. MMF’s beneficiaries are looking for respect, recognition, and inclusiveness, she said, nonprofits, governments, and UN agencies must do more than bring comfort; they should support the widows in their own efforts to act and thrive. To do so, she recommends bringing knowledge and inclusiveness to the widows so they can move on socio-economically, stand up, and fight for their rights. Ms. Kulsum Shadab Wahab, Executive Director of Hothur Foundation, emphasized that widows are still shadowed in Indian society. The Hothur Foundation, which works with widows and

women victims of acid attacks and domestic violence, and believes that creating awareness, removing stigma, and vocational training are key to change the status of widows in India and ultimately globally.

### **Widowhood and COVID-19**

Anita Bhatia, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, underlined the devastating impact of COVID-19 on widowhood. She stated that for every 10 female deaths globally, there have been 15 male deaths, leading to an increasing number of widows, who are an already particularly vulnerable group. Structural and pre-existing inequalities have further hampered widows' recovery in COVID-19 times, she said, and UN research showed that during the pandemic, widows have been prevented from benefiting equally from governments' responses to COVID-19. She expressed the commitment of UN Women to work with member states to remove all women from the cycle of poverty and called for the SDG Outcome Report in 2030 to include progress on the rights of widows to ensure that they are living a life of dignity.

### **Conclusions**

The panel agreed that even if widows are more visible now than ever before, further efforts must be done to include their voices in regulations and policies at the national and international levels in order to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights obligations. They all stressed the urgency for the UN to fully recognize the status of widows and their special needs, and to offer better framework of protection of their rights across policy agendas like peace and security, sustainable development, and human rights. Moreover, the speakers also acknowledged that enhancing the capacity of widows through education and employment opportunities is key to breaking the circle of poverty widows and orphans fall into after the loss of their loved ones.