



Global Fund for Widows

**Closing the Protection Gap for Widows
in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings**

Summary Report on UN Security Council

Arria Formula Meeting

15 November 2021

UNSC Arria Formula Meeting
Closing the Protection Gap for Widows in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings
Monday, 15 November 2021, 1:30-4p ET

Briefings:

Welcome remarks by African Union Ambassador Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed

Opening keynote address by Ms. Anita Bhatia, Deputy Executive Director for Resource Management, Sustainability and Partnerships, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)

Statements by co-Chairs of the Group of Friends of Women of the Sahel
European Union Ambassador Mr. Olof Skoog
Deputy Permanent Representative of Niger, Chargé d’Affaires, a.i., Mr. Aougui Niandou

Briefing by Ms. Heather Ibrahim-Leathers, Founder, Global Fund for Widows

Briefing by Civil Society, Ms. Mahboba Rawi

Statements by Co-Sponsors *(alphabetically)*

Estonia	Norway
Ireland	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Kenya	Tunisia
Mexico	Viet Nam

Statements by UNSC Members *(alphabetically)*

China	Russia
France	United Kingdom
India	United States of America

Statements by Member States *(alphabetically)*

Brazil	Greece	Poland
Costa Rica	Malta	Portugal
Ecuador	Morocco	Sierra Leone
Germany	Nepal	Ukraine

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UN Security Council Arria Formula Meeting “Closing the Protection Gap for Widows in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings”

Virtual Debate Summary

Monday, 15 November 2021

The Permanent Mission of Niger, the African Union and European Union as co-Chairs of the Group of Friends for Women of the Sahel, jointly with Estonia, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, Norway, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, Vietnam, and non-Council Member Sierra Leone held an Arria Formula Meeting to explore how to close the protection gaps for widows in conflict and post-conflict settings. UN Women, Deputy Executive Director, Anita Bhatia offered key note remarks, while Global Fund for Widows (GFW) Founder and President, Heather Ibrahim-Leathers and Mahboba Rawi of Mahboba’s Promise offered civil society remarks. 26 delegations offered remarks during the virtual meeting, including all 15 members of the Security Council, and was part of the “WPS Trio” of events between the Presidencies of Ireland, Kenya, and Mexico in Fall 2021.

Thematic Overview by Briefers

UN Women, Deputy Executive Director, Anita Bhatia presented the keynote address on behalf of the agency, outlining three main challenges: first, that conflict widows are often not able to access death certificates which would allow them to inherit assets and access social services; second, that women want ceasefires, peace, and inclusion, and repeatedly ask the Council for such; and third and over all lack of gender data, but noted that UN Women encourages a minimum of five different types of marital status when collecting census data, and noted its particular importance when informing international response in fragile contexts. GFW’s remarks centered on the multiple and intersecting harms widows can face, the negative coping mechanisms they use, and where current responses fail to meet their protection needs. Contextualizing the discussion, Mahboba’s Promise shared the plight of Afghan widows, sharing two testimonies and discussing the limiting gender inequalities that have left them in no-win situations as long as the international community fails to act.

“To Count, You Need to Be Counted”

Nearly every intervention touched on the need for disaggregated data collection. Participants stressed that without accurate numbers it would be next to impossible to capture the scope of the problem as well as develop the people-centered responses in humanitarian and development programs. Several Member States noted that the traditional definition of “widow” does not reflect widowhood in conflict. Germany urged for the collection of data on “half widows” as well. Illustrating this disparate difference, Mahboba Rawi offered testimony that in her 25 years of work in Afghanistan she believed that the number of widows in country is not the 2 million government figure, but likely upwards of 5 million and increasing due to the escalating political and humanitarian crisis under Taliban rule.

Not Merely Victims

Many delegations also noted that it was important to refrain from simply labeling widows as victims of conflict due to their loss of a spouse. Several States called for more inclusive

peacebuilding processes and incoming Council Member Brazil provided a concrete recommendation that increased communication between the PBC (Peacebuilding Commission) would help facilitate the reintegration and participation of widows in post-conflict settings. In similar vein, Members of the Council saw the importance of future inclusion of widows under the WPS Agenda. While many stated that they wish to refrain from defining a woman based on her marital status, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) argued that despite the Council's preference for conciseness, normative and operational frameworks and responses had to expand to include widows, and as Ireland phrased it, "meet the world where it's at," to address gender inequality.

Shifting Cultural Norms

Part of the Members' interventions included suggestions on addressing underlying gender equality challenges to break down gender norms and build sustainable peace. SVG suggested a multi-level funding mechanism to address economic recovery measures, while Kenya underscored that its Themi Loan Fund looked to spur cultural change by enabling widows the ability to access capital for entrepreneurial endeavors. Regardless, Costa Rica stressed that without action to better support the livelihoods of widows, the international community would continue to perpetuate gender inequalities. Both economic inclusion and political participation interventions, Members agreed, would facilitate the creation of new cultural norms and demonstrate the important roles women hold in building sustainable peace.

Multiple Intersecting Challenges and Vulnerabilities

Participants' interventions touched on the increased vulnerabilities and cascading challenges from widows' discrimination and marginalization. Greece, for example noted the linkages between widowhood, generational economic hardship, and migration; a number of delegations, including Norway noted that children, their education, and vulnerability to recruitment are increased in widowed households; and Mexico stressed the link between widowhood and access to healthcare, reproductive, and mental health services must not be omitted. Due to the cross-cutting linkages, Member States saw it as critical to ensure economic stability through improved humanitarian aid access and delivery, as well as targeted international development efforts.

Conclusions

Perhaps Malta said it best when it noted that the Arria Formula discussion provided the Member States an opportunity to examine the effectiveness of international response when looking through the lens of an often-overlooked group. In this vein, Member States agreed that widows have been overlooked within the WPS Agenda, despite their natural place within it and welcomed the opportunity to discuss its importance. Acknowledging that widows have additional challenges, all of which are spurred by underlying gender inequalities, Member States did provide several concrete ways in which the UNSC can look to address the protection challenges of widows in conflict and post-conflict settings:

- Greater communication with the PBC,
- Taking localized approaches to programming and financing to ensure rural and vulnerable groups are not left behind,
- Improve gender sensitivities in Peacekeeping Operations POC policies and increased women's involvement in missions to respond to widows' plights,

- Investment in social awareness programming to ensure cultural shifts around widows as both a prevention and peacebuilding measure,
- Monitoring protection challenges and progress with widowhood's inclusion in the Annual Secretary-General's Report on WPS,
- Increased focus on widows and female heads of households in humanitarian aid and development programming,
- UNSC legislation to address widowhood through an amendment to UNSCR 1325,
- Improved gender data collection, including disaggregated data on marital status and female heads of households.