

# International Conference on Widowhood “WIDOWS’ VOICES – EMPOWERED”



Women for Human Rights, single women group



# International Conference on Widowhood “WIDOWS’ VOICES – EMPOWERED”



Organized by  
Women for Human Rights, single women group (WHR)  
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# Acknowledgement

**W**idowhood is the most neglected of all gender and human rights issues among women's issues. Conflict, violence, HIV/AIDs and natural disasters have created a phenomenal number of widows of all ages. Many of them are victims of cultural practices and violence, have been displaced and have no access to resources. Widows tend to be invisible and their voices unheard at all levels.

In this regard, Women for Human Rights, single women group (WHR) organized the **International Conference on Widowhood "Widows' Voices-Empowered"** on June 24 and 25, 2010, to make them visible and to ensure their effective participation at all levels.

On behalf of WHR, we would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to all individuals and organizations without whom this International Conference on Widowhood and our endeavour to address the issues of widows in both national and international arena couldn't be succeeded.

We are very grateful to **Rt. Honourable President Dr. Ram Baran Yadav**, the First President of Nepal for providing us his valuable time and opportunity to meet with our international and distinguished delegates. We would also like to appreciate for the recognition and the support shown by the government of Nepal for the widows' movement.

We are indebted to **Honourable Minister Sarwadev Prasad Ojha** for accepting our invitation to attend the event as a Chief Guest and for his commitment to work for social security of the widows.

We are thankful to all the distinguished guests and international delegates **Homaira Ferozi**, Educational Coordinator of Women for Afghan Women, Afghanistan; **Margaret Becker**, from University of Adelaide, Australia; **Sarah Homan**, from University of Adelaide, Australia; **Rupa**

**Subba**, Member of Bhutani Mahila Manch, Bhutan; **Philipp Thien**, from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Germany; **Dr. Mohini Giri**, Chairperson of Guild of Service, India; **Dr. Deepali Bhanot**, Life Member of Guild of Service, India; **Dr. Felix Sugirtharaj**, Hony. Secretary of Coastal Poor Development Action, India; **Helen Chandra**, Executive Secretary of Centre of Association for Rural Education and Services (CARES), India; **Shilpa Kashelkar**, Women's Right Coordinator of Yuva, India; **Anindit Roy Chowdhury**, Regional Resource Mobilization Officer of UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office, India; **Dr. Masuma Hasan**, Board Member of AURAT Foundation and member of SANWED, Pakistan; **Anuradha Wickramasinghe**, Chairman of Small Fishers Federation, Sri Lanka; **Maj. Gen. Dr. Dudley Perera**, Chairman of Ranaviru Family Counseling and Support Service (RFCSS), Sri Lanka; **Margaret Owen**, Director of Widows for Peace through Democracy (WPD) and International Focal Person of SANWED, UK; **Jennie O Hara**, from University of Manchester, U.K.; **Sandy Ramsey**, President of Crisis Recovery International, USA; and **Beth Fairleigh**, member of Crisis Recovery International, USA for their valuable participation and contribution in the conference despite of their busy schedule.

We would also like to thank **Mahendra Prasad Shrestha**, Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, **Atmaram Pandey**, Joint Secretary of Planning Commission; **Kedar Poudel**, Joint Secretary of Ministry of Law and Justice and **Ratna Kaji Bajracharya**, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare for chairing the sessions and **Dr. Bidya Nath Koirala**, M.Phil Program Coordinator and **Prakash Mani Sharma**, Advocate, Executive Director of ProPublic for supporting as moderators during country paper presentations. We are grateful to **Felix Neuhaus** of DED for facilitating during the thematic discussion. We highly acknowledge the support received from

**Nainkala Thapa**, President of National Women's Commission, **Amuda Shrestha**, Member of National Women's Commission and **Astalaxmi Shakya**, the Former Minister of Nepal.

We would like to appreciate the participation of the **International volunteers** for country paper presentation. Also, the special gratitude goes to all the **authors** who have contributed by writing articles in the book "**A Journey towards Empowerment and The Status of Single Women in Nepal**" which was launched during the conference.

We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to all the **media personnel** and various **media channels** that participated in the conference and supported us by highlighting the objectives of the conference and the issues of widows for public awareness through both the print and electronic media.

We are very thankful to **European Commission** and the Strategic Partners **DanidaHUGOU**,

**DED Nepal** and **FES Nepal** for providing us the financial and technical support for organizing the conference.

**WHR advisors, board members, staff members** and the **volunteers** deserve the special gratitude for supporting in organizing and managing the conference successfully.

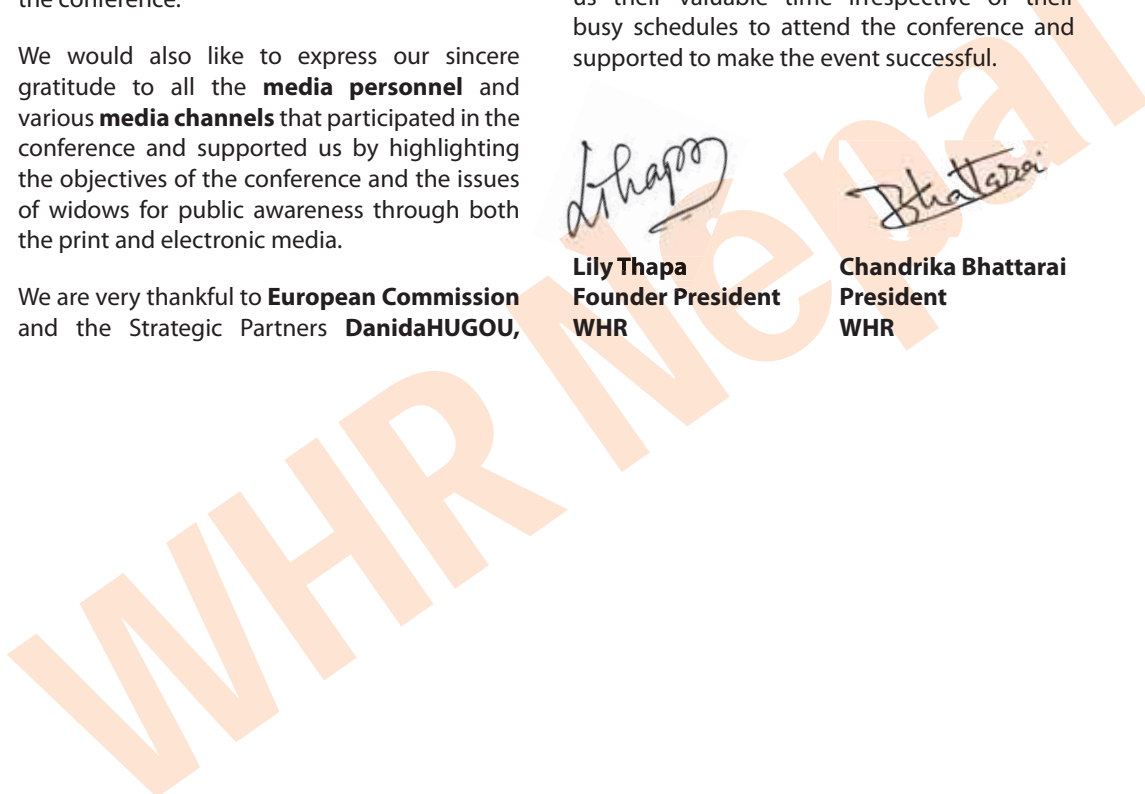
Lastly, on behalf of WHR, we would like to thank everyone who participated and contributed for the conference and to all those who provided us their valuable time irrespective of their busy schedules to attend the conference and supported to make the event successful.



**Lily Thapa**  
**Founder President**  
**WHR**



**Chandrika Bhattarai**  
**President**  
**WHR**



# Abbreviation

<b>CARES</b>	Centre of Association for Rural Education and Services
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>DED</b>	Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (German Development Service)
<b>FES</b>	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>HUGOU</b>	Human Rights and Goal Governance
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>RFCSS</b>	Ranaviru Family Counseling and Support Service
<b>SANWED</b>	South Asian Network for Widows' Empowerment in Development
<b>SWG</b>	Single Women Group
<b>UNIFEM</b>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>WPD</b>	Widows for Peace through Democracy
<b>WHR</b>	Women for Human Rights, single women group







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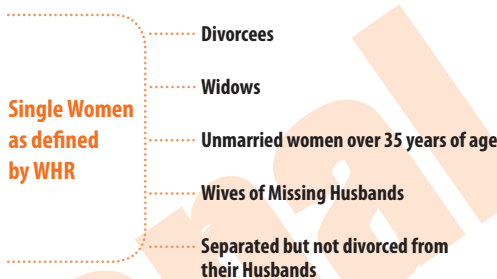


# About WHR

**W**omen for Human Rights, single women group (WHR), established in 1994, is a Non-Governmental Organization actively working for the human rights of the single women (widows) in Nepal. It has been dedicated to create an active network of widows across the nation, regional and international level. WHR aims for an equitable society where widows are respected and can live in dignity with sufficient social, cultural, economical, legal and political rights.

WHR works with single women; widows, wives of missing husbands, divorcees, unmarried women of 35 years of age or women separated but not divorced from their husbands. It defines “**widows**” as “**single women**” through a national declaration. WHR focuses

on five working areas which are Socio-Cultural Empowerment and Movement, Economic Empowerment and Mobilization, Justice, Human Rights and Peace, Local Governance and Institutional and Organizational Development.



*WHR focuses for 99% on Widows*

## Background and Concept of International Conference

**T**hroughout Asia, the issues of widows are pervasive. The unprecedented rise in the numbers of widows has been caused by the proliferation of armed conflict, HIV/AIDs, natural disasters and the persistence of harmful traditional practices. Statistics barely exist on widowhood except in India. In Nepal, after the decade long conflict, there has been tens of thousands of women who lost their husbands along with their livelihoods and are now living in extreme poverty. In India, there are an estimated 40 million widows, many of whom are child widows who have succumbed to a life of discrimination. Self-immolation of widows occurs where women are facing severe cruelty from their community and husband’s family where they feel that there is no way out other than ending their life. Furthermore, African countries such as Malawi, Nigeria and Zambia are the places where widow cleansing still exists,

in which the widow is forced to have intercourse with a relative of her deceased husband before being allowed to remain in her home. Globally, sexual exploitation occurs between widows and their in-laws families, leading to psychological trauma, violence, economic insecurity and displacement of their children. Protection of this invisible group of women worldwide must be recognized, especially in developing countries as numerous human rights abuses are occurring against widows everyday.

In many countries, the status of women without men is very low; most often they are extremely marginalized from all aspects of the society. Widowhood is a problem throughout the world where violence and severe discrimination are increasing due to conflict, unawareness and patriarchal societies in which we live. Widows are viewed as the curse to their families, often blamed of their husband’s death where their struggle is

invisible and their needs become a distant dream. All of these factors restrict a woman's ability to lead a dignified and empowered life.

The issues of widows in patriarchal society like in Nepal are numerous especially after the decade long conflict and the traditional way of life. WHR aims for an equitable society where widows are respected and can live in dignity with sufficient socio-cultural, economical, legal and political rights.

On May 2005, WHR organized an **International Conference on Capacity Building of Widows**, a step towards setting up the platform for the voice of widows to be heard in South Asian level. As a result, South Asian Network for Widows' Empowerment in Development (SANWED) was established. The following programs for advocacy of widows had been undertaken in South Asia through the following forums:

- A widowhood roundtable organized by Widows for Peace through Democracy (WPD) with the support from Sigrid Rausing Trust.



International Conference held on May 2005

- A South Asian conference on marginalized women organized by Guild of Service supported by UNIFEM.
- A Colombo Declaration on widows that emerged from the 15th SAARC summit through the advocacy and lobby by SANWED.
- A Widows' Charter developed by Margaret Owen of WPD.

As the secretariat of SANWED, WHR organized two days **International Conference on Widowhood "Widows' Voices Empowered"** from 24<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2010 at Kathmandu, Nepal.

## Goals and Objectives of the Conference

**The objectives of the International Conference were:**

- To establish an International voice on the Status of Widows in order to effectively strategize on the equality of widows.
- To collaborate with International partners so that there will be effective advocacy campaigns on the issues of widows.
- To examine how the policy change has mainstreamed widows' rights in the state level mechanisms to develop strategies on pressurizing international bodies for the rights of widows.
- Share best practices on how organizations can work together effectively in the pursuit of widows.

## Participations

Over 200 participants, comprised of individuals from 13 countries, Nepal Government Officials, representatives from various International and National organizations, and participants from 68 various districts of Nepal came together for the two days conference in Kathmandu. Together, the participants discussed the issues faced by widows today, debated solutions to the problems and finalized the Kathmandu Declaration.

*For detail, see Annex 1 and 2.*

# Pre-Conference Meetings

Pre-conference meetings were held for the overall preparation and management of the International Conference which formed core committees for the conference, assigned roles and responsibilities to each member of the committees, discussed, shared ideas and planned for organizing the conference successfully.

The pre-conference meeting formed the core committee for the conference, identified criteria for inviting the International participants, shared the concept note of the conference and assigned the roles and responsibilities to each member of the committees.

The core committees outlined the framework of thematic paper with the consultation of various professionals, to be discussed during the conference.

# Committees

A core committee and eight other different committees were formed and accordingly, the roles and responsibilities were divided to each member of the committees. Lily Thapa, Founder President of WHR, was nominated as Coordinator for the International Conference.

# Press Meet

Media plays very important role as a source of information. WHR believes it to be one of the vital and effective agents for raising the voice of people and bringing the social change. Media are also the major facilitators in highlighting the issues and raising the public awareness. With the objective of informing the people about the International Conference on Widowhood "Widows' Voices–Empowered" through various media channels, WHR organized a press meet at Nepal Tourism Board in Kathmandu on 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2010. The media personnel attending the press meet were requested for their participation in the conference and media coverage of the event in order to sensitize the public about the widows' issues.

# Proceeding of the Conference

Day 1: 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2010

## Peace Rally

With the objective of wishing for peace and harmony in the country and creating local awareness for the widows' rights movement and the two days conference, WHR organized a peace rally before the opening ceremony of the conference. International participants, widows and participants from various districts, representatives from various organizations, WHR board and staff members participated in the rally. The rally got marched from Nepal Tourism Board to Ratna Park.



## Inauguration of the Conference

The two days **International Conference on Widowhood** was organized at Hotel Park Village located at Budhanilkantha in Kathmandu. The chief guest during the inauguration session was **Honorable Minister Sarwadev Prasad Ojha**, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare. The session was chaired by **Chandrika Bhattarai**, President of WHR.

**Anuradha Wickramasinghe**, President of Small Fishers Federation of Sri Lanka and core committee member of SANWED; **Dr. Mohini Giri**, Chairperson of Guild of Service, India; **Dr. Masuma Hasan**, Treasurer and Board of Governors of AURAT Foundation and SANWED member, Pakistan; **Lars Peter Christensen**, Program Coordinator of DanidaHUGOU; **Margaret Owen**, Director of WPD, U.K. and International focal person of SANWED, **Aasta Laxmi Shakya Bohara**, Former Minister, **Nainkala Thapa**, Chairperson of National Women's Commission and **Amuda Shrestha**,

Member of National Women's Commission and **Lily Thapa**, Founder President of WHR were the speakers in the inauguration session.



The formal inauguration began with lighting of the candles in a big Nepali vessel named as "Khadkulo" by the representatives from each participating country symbolizing the hope that the light will eradicate all forms of discrimination against widows and enlighten the hope for equality, dignity and justice to widows globally.

## Welcome and Highlights of the Conference

The formal inauguration was followed by the welcome speech by **Lily Thapa**, Founder President of WHR. Beginning with the brief sharing of the current situation of the widows globally, she highlighted the major objectives of the conference and focussed on strengthening the network of organizations working for widows nationally and internationally so that widows' voices reach into the international development agenda. She also called for widows' advocacy groups to unite together for their efforts.





# Keynote Speeches

The Keynote Speakers were as following:

## **Keynote Speaker**

**Anuradha Wickramasinghe**

**President of Small Fishers Federation, and Core Committee Member of SANWED  
Sri Lanka**



**Anuradha Wickramasinghe** mentioned that WHR has succeeded to change different social, religious and cultural discriminatory practices. In India and Sri Lanka, though there are organizations working for widows, their issues are not prioritized by the government. He emphasized on necessity of strengthening SANWED to address the issues of widows in South Asia.

## **Keynote Speaker**

**Dr. Mohini Giri**

**Chairperson of Guild of Service  
India**



**Dr. Mohini Giri** stated that widows' issues are not only the problem of Nepal but the problem in South Asian region. She spoke about the importance of National Action Plan of widows

in India and emphasized on the need of National Action Plan for widows in Nepal too.

She shared about the situation of single women in Vrindaban, India, where 16,000 widows are living but their situations are worse and shared the fact that touching a dead body of single woman is considered a matter of shame.

**“ I see WHR Nepal as a leading organization in South Asia into empowering widows. We need to replicate the model of WHR in all of our country to address widowhood issues. ”**



**Keynote Speaker**

**Nainkala Thapa**  
Chairperson of National Women's Commission  
Nepal

**Nainkala Thapa** remarked that the problem of poor status of widows is not just in South Asian countries but found worldwide and is mainly due to the existing patriarchal system that is inflicting social marginalization, inhuman cultural practices on widows. She also urged to work for changing the mind-set of every one of us.



“ I am ready to join hands with WHR in their movement to empower widows. ”

**Keynote Speaker**

**Asta Laxmi Shakya Bohara**  
The Former Minister  
Nepal

**Asta Laxmi Shakya Bohara** said that the main issue that widows in South Asia are facing today is combating the patriarchal system. She added that although the situation of widows has improved, the situation is yet not satisfactory and focused that all the political parties should work together for the equality of women.



*Noticing at one of the slogans of WHR "We Want Opportunity, Not Sympathy" she said,*

“ *Indeed, opportunity should be given to widows so that they can live their lives with dignity. I am hopeful that the conference would come up with collective strategies to end discrimination against widows of Nepal and all over the world.* ”

**Keynote Speaker**

**Dr. Masuma Hasan**  
**Board Member of AURAT Foundation and**  
**SANWED Member**  
**Pakistan**



**Dr. Masuma Hasan** shared that like in other South Asian countries, Pakistani widows, many of whom are young, are also facing discrimination due to inhuman cultural practices. Due to lack of profiling and mapping of widows, the actual number and their different issues have not been addressed by the Government of Pakistan and that about 3.5 million displaced Afghani refugees including many widows are living in Pakistan.

**“ The progress towards widows’ rights is impossible without the existence of peace and for this, all the countries should work collectively. There needs to be peace between countries and within a country itself. ”**

**Keynote Speaker**

**Amuda Shrestha**  
**Member of National Women's Commission**  
**Nepal**

**Amuda Shrestha** stated that while being a woman, there is discrimination, being a widow, there is violence and agreed that women and widows are subordinated because of the existence of deeply rooted patriarchal system.



**“ It is necessary to develop widows friendly policies in Nepal. National Women's Commission will support to develop National Action Plan for widows, which is very much needed in the present context. ”**

**Keynote Speaker**

**Lars Peter Christensen**  
Program Coordinator of DanidaHUGOU



Recalling the three year partnership between WHR and DanidaHUGOU for supporting WHR in its efforts, **Lars Peter Christensen** shared that DanidaHUGOU is proud to be supporting WHR, and also welcomed other international organization to join the strategic partnership to work for the cause of widows.

He gave best wishes to all the participants of the international conference, and encouraged the team to agree on common issues, find ways to strengthen the network, create joint platforms to improve lives of widows and also contribute to the society.

**Keynote Speaker**

**Margaret Owen**  
Director of Widows for Peace through Democracy (WPD) and International Focal Person of SANWED  
U.K

**Margaret Owen** focused that widows of all regions and countries should unite together and raise their voice so that it will be heard by the government. She emphasized on collecting data on widows. She said, **"Mapping and profiling system of WHR should be replicated in other countries by mobilizing the widows themselves."** She suggested for lobbying with government for quantitative and qualitative research which should focus on how widows are running their livelihood, sexual violence, socio-economic status of widows, condition of young widows and other. Lastly, she shared about the Kathmandu Declaration and said, **"The declaration would be used as 'bullet' against harmful practices against widows for government to make policies for the widows of Nepal."**



**“ I wish, we could have Lily Thapa in each of our country to address widows' issues strategically. ”**

## Launching of the Book "A Journey towards Empowerment and The Status of Single Women in Nepal"

After the speeches from the keynote speakers, the book "**A Journey towards Empowerment and The Status of Single Women in Nepal**" was launched by the Chief Guest, Honourable Minister Sarwadev Prasad Ojha. The book intends to provide a key-hole view of the journey that WHR has traversed so far. Chapter one of this book has dwelled upon WHR's formation, the processes and the modalities that WHR has undertaken in voicing the issues of single women of Nepal. The book has also documented the major milestones that WHR and its constituent groups have achieved in the course of its journey. This book intends to give overview of the status of the widows based on the profile maintained by WHR. The last chapter of this book contains various articles on widows of Nepal.



### Few Words from Honourable Minister



**Honorable Minister Sarwadev Prasad Ojha** committed to work for National Five Year Planning which will be focused on health, education and social security for single women among others. He emphasized on the need to start developing strategies in country context and extended his best wishes for the success of the conference.

### Country Paper Presentations

After the inauguration of the conference, the next session was of country paper presentations which were carried out in two sessions. Altogether 12 countries presented their country papers. During country paper presentation, each representative country reported on the status of widows in their state. While widows face difficult situations around the world, it was clear that there is a significant difference between widows of South Asian countries and those of Non-South Asian countries.

#### First Session of the Country Paper Presentation

In the first session, there was the presentation from the countries Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Germany and India. The session was chaired by **Atma Ram Pandey**, Joint Secretary of National Planning Commission and moderated by **Helen Chandra**, Executive Secretary of CARES and **Srijana Lohani**, Program Manager of WHR.

### Vote of Thanks

Thus, the inauguration session came to an end with the Vote of Thanks from **Chandrika Bhattarai**, President of WHR.



The inauguration session was over and all the participants were taken for lunch.

**Some highlights of the country paper presentations are as following:**

*For detail, see Annex 8*



**Afghanistan, Homaira Ferozi, Educational Coordinator of Women for Afghan Women**



*"It is estimated that 1.5 of the 26.6 million Afghans are widowed women. 90% of Afghan widows have children the majority of whom have four. Their average age is 35 years old, and they are generally illiterate. In 2001, the United States established Women for Afghan Women which provides a family guidance center and shelter to the Afghani widowed women."*

**Australia, Margaret Becker, University of Adelaide**



*"For couples marrying in 2000-2002 the average age of women entering widowhood was 75 years. Widows commonly experience loneliness, and their happiness is related to the frequency of close personal conversations with friends. The Australian government started supporting widows in 1942 to assist women who had lost a partner and could not be expected to engage in employment due to child care responsibilities or age."*

**Bangladesh, Ferdous Ara Begun, UN CEDAW Committee Member**

*"Bangladesh has the highest rate of early marriage in Asia. A 2004 United Nations report estimated that 48 percent of all girls between 15 and 19 years of age were married, divorced or widowed. Traditionally, parents marry their daughters young to decrease the economic burden on the household. The government has helped the case of widows by providing allowances and creating family pensions for widows of government employees."*

**Bhutan, Rupa Subba, Member of Bhutani Mahila Manch**



*"Many women lost their husbands during conflict and even became the victims of sexual violence. Of the 100,000 refugees about 10,000 women are widows. Under third country resettlement program which was initiated in 2007, about 5,000 widows have been settled in third countries. The condition of widows is vulnerable in the refugee camps. They are suffering from many problems regarding economy, health, security, and psychological trauma."*

*The condition of widows is vulnerable in the refugee camps. They are suffering from many problems regarding economic, health, security, mental and psychological trauma. Due to the social stigma they are bound inside the household chores leading to suppression of their voices towards rights and equality.*

### Germany, Philipp Thien, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung



*"The widows of Germany do not need to show their status of widowhood in terms of their clothes. They are also not excluded from societal and family events. It is rather the case that the majority of widows receive respect from their family members and a feeling of empathy for them." The pension system for German widows is built into the general insurance system. In this system, there is a special allocation for widows who may not be able to work for reasons of disability or the necessity to care for their children.*

### India, Dr. Deepali Bhanot, Guild of Service



*"All widows in India are confronted with socio-cultural discrimination, economic deprivation and emotional crisis but the situation of a Hindu widow is much worse than the widows from other faith traditions as the patriarchal oppression and the unfair treatment meted out to her has the sanction of tradition and scriptures. They face linguistic violence, behavioral restrictions, economic deprivation and inheritance denial."*

## Second Session of the Country Paper Presentation

In the second session, there was the presentation from the countries Italy, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Scotland/UK and United States of America. The session was chaired by **Kedar Poudel**, Joint Secretary of Ministry of Law and Justice and moderated by **Dr. Deepali Bhanot**, Life Member of Guild of Service, India and **Nirmala Dhungana**, Executive Secretary of WHR, Nepal.

### Italy, Stefania Nardin, Incontro fra I Popoli

*"Particularly the condition of widows involves different plights. There are problems in redefining their identity and their role within family, problems in raising children, problems with the husband's family and with the friend network. However the economic issue is among the most pressing problem making widow's life unstable."*



**Nepal, Durga Neupane, President, Western Regional Network of WHR**



*"In Nepalese society, widowhood is not seen as a natural stage of life but rather as a curse. Illness, natural death, accidents, and epidemics have been the major cause of death to husbands. However the decade long conflict in Nepal also led to increasing numbers of young widows and orphans. The death of the husband marks the painful transition from wife to a single woman in a state where she is physically alive but socially dead."*

**Pakistan, Dr Masuma Hasan, Member of SANWED**



*"Like other South Asian countries, Pakistani single women are also facing discrimination due to discriminatory religion, inhuman cultural practices. Second World War has brought destructions in the world; it has also affected Pakistan which has increased the massive number of single women in Pakistan. Many of these were young single women."*

*But due to lack of profiling and mapping of single women, the actual number and their different issues has not been addressed by government of Pakistan. About 3.5 million Afghani refugees including many single women are living in Pakistan who are displaced due to conflict. However, their other information is also lacking. Widows of Nepal, India, Srilanka are somehow organized in a group but in Pakistan, widows are still not organized so the problem is not addressed yet by concerned stakeholders."*

**Sri Lanka, Dr. Dudley Perera, Chairman of RFCSS**



*"Most of the war widows are young below 40 years of age with the burden of looking after their children and are from low socio-income category and are unemployed. The major difficulties encountered are: Changing herself to be the chief occupant; Taking over the responsibilities of the family; Controlling Finances (Monthly Salary); Schooling of children; Feeding the family & their dependence; Finding accommodation to your kids & dependence; There are some government supportive role such as: Funeral expenses; Military Funeral; Initial grant of Rs 100,000/- to Next of Skin (wife), if no children 50% goes to diseased parents; diseased Soldiers salary to his widow until he reaches 55 years (retirement age); Pension; providing houses to needy; Scholarships to children."*



**Scotland/UK, Suzanne Solly, University of Glasgow**



*"In Scotland and the UK single women and widows are free to pursue careers and activities which allow them to fulfil their potential rather than prohibiting it. A widow is freely allowed to pursue education and a career of her choice however her commitments at home may prohibit this. She is not excluded and harassed for her loss but in fact is shown sympathy and compassion."*

**USA, Morgan St. Clair, Beth Fairleigh, Crisis Recovery International**



*"American widows endure the life of widowhood differently. American social roles were defined as a "two sphere ideology" following the social systems which evolved over time. As women became more independent, educated and financially stable, losing their husband was not as traumatic as it once may have been."*

While the situations of widows around the world varies, the country wise presentations made it clear that widows should unite together to support each other and promote their right to equality.

## Documentary Show

After the country paper presentations, WHR's most recent documentary was shown to the participants. The documentary highlighted the activities carried out by WHR.

## Welcome Dinner

On the same day, welcome dinner was organized for the International guests and delegates at Bhojan Griha located at Dilli Bazaar, Kathmandu with fascinating Nepalese cultural décor and artefacts. The guests and WHR board members received the chance to know more about each other as well as enjoy Nepali folk dances and songs.

## Meeting with Rt. Honourable President Dr. Ram Baran Yadav

The international and distinguished delegates of the conference had the opportunity to meet with **Rt. Honourable President Dr. Ram Baran Yadav**, the First President of Nepal. The meeting marked an important step for recognizing and showing support by the government for the widows' movement. Representatives had the opportunity to discuss the conference events and the

hope for a strong international platform for the widows' movement.

The President was encouraged to support the movement not only in Nepal but also as part of an international agenda. His willingness to meet with participants of the conference demonstrates the progress in pushing the widows' movement into the political system.



## Day 2: 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2010

### Heritage Walk

On the second day of the International Conference, 25<sup>th</sup> June 2010, there was two hours heritage walk to Nagi Gumba Monastery situated at Shivapuri- Najarjung National park.

This walk was scheduled in the tight schedule of two days conference so that the guests could enjoy the scenic beauty and have glimpse of the heritage nearby. Tourism Development Endeavor (TUDE), youth led organization took the responsibility to guide the group to the Nagi Gumba. Niraj Tamrakar and Sailendra Dongol represented the organization.

Sumeera Shrestha, Program Coordinator of WHR along with the International guests left the hotel around 6:30 AM to reach the Shivapuri National Park (144 sq km). The representatives from TUDE shared few hiking ethics and some information of the species available in the park. They also shared about the Nagi Monastery. The monastery was a beautiful place to see enjoying the scenic beauty of the park and the glimpse of the valley.

The group enjoyed the walk around the monastery clicking photos around and few of them speaking with the nuns of the monastery.

After spending wonderful moments they were back to hotel. On the way they visited temple of lord Vishnu called Buddhanilkantha, the temple built in Lichhavi period around 1000 years ago. In the temple they viewed Asia's largest icon of Sleeping Vishnu, a massive sculpture carved in a huge monolith lying on Ananta Sesa.

The group then was back to the hotel and moved for the conference.

*For detail, see Annex 5*

## Plenary Session Presentation

The plenary session was held on the second day of the conference, moderated by **Dr. Bidya Nath Koirala**, M.Phil Program Coordinator, Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University. The session was chaired by **Dr. Felix Sugirtharaj**, Honorary Secretary of Coastal Poor Development Action Network, India. The chair of the session requested each presenter to present their papers.

The plenary session presentations were done by **Lily Thapa**, Founder President of WHR, Nepal; **Margaret Owen**, Director of WPD, UK and **Dr. Mohini Giri**, Chairperson of the Guild of Service, India who are the pacesetters of the widows' movement. They addressed the foundation of the widows' movement as well as its future.



Their presentations focused on the greatest issues facing the movement today. The societal importance of creating protection for widows around the world, especially for young widows of post conflict zones, was addressed. Women were called to unite globally in the movement by combating the standards of the patriarchal system and the means in which society tries to oppress widows. Finally, there was a call for a single leader to take the stage moving the single women's movement into the international arena.

*For detail, see Annex 9*

## Voices of the Participants



“WHR has been a role model for the widow's empowerment. This now needs to be replicated in other countries also.”

- Dr. Masuma Hasan

“The strategies adopted by WHR needs to be replicated in South Asian level and there needs to be a woman like Lily Thapa in each South Asian country to lead the issues of widows.”

- Dr. Mohini Giri



“Mapping and profiling system of WHR should be replicated in other countries by mobilizing the single women themselves. WHR model should be replicated in Afghanistan and Iraq also.”

- Margaret Owen



## Remarkable Moment

**Dr. Masuma Hasan** requested all to give Standing Ovation to **Lily Thapa** for her endeavour in raising the voices of widows and her tireless effort for their empowerment. This ovation received from both the national and international participants in the conference is indeed a remarkable achievement of WHR.





## Lunch Break

All the participants were taken for lunch before moving for the next session of presentations on Thematic Group Work and Discussion.

## Thematic Group Work and Discussion

Conference participants were then divided into four groups to discuss solutions to the issues facing widows today. This session of thematic group work and discussion was chaired by **Ratna Kaji Bajracharya**, Joint Secretary of Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare and moderated by **Margaret Becker** and **Advocate Prakash Mani Sharma**. Group One was facilitated by **Felix Neuhaus** and **Nirmala Dhungana**, Group Two by **Anindit Roy Chowdhury** and **Pushpa Ghimire**, Group Three by **Dr. Masuma Hasan** and **Srijana Lohani** and Group Four by **Margaret Owen** and **Advocate Kabita Pandey**.

Group One focused on the **Role of Widows in Peace Building and Conflict Management**. The primary issues faced by widows in post conflict zones include personal security, social vulnerability, and lack of resources and programs to help widowed women. Group solutions to these issues included systematic mapping and profiling of widows to submit to the government and international organizations proving the plight of post conflict widows,

providing special provisions for widows in peace accords, and increasing the activity of government organizations and NGOs to meet the needs of post conflict widows.

Group Two discussed **Ways to Mobilize Resources for Widows Focusing on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**. For widows to be successful, group two determined that widows' children must have access to education, widows are entitled to the Ration card, they need legal advocacy, and they must unite in the fight for widow's equality. Group two recommended that in order to mobilize resources on the national and international level widows networks should be expanded, the qualification to be "single" should be broadened, women should continue to fight for single women's equality especially advocating for property and equal rights as well as for a single woman quota in the private and public sector, and finally women should push for a gender responsive budget.

Group Three's topic was **Mobilizing Single Women for Reducing Gender Based Violence**. Their discussion focused specifically on combating gender violence faced by widows globally. The group proposed that there should be legislation to ensure equal opportunity, wages, and education for women, leadership development programs for women, a change in societal attitude that widowhood is not a justification for discrimination, a change by both men and women in cultural patriarchal



Group One



Group Two



Group Three



Group Four

practices, information and educational programs for men to understand and appreciate the plight of women, quality for children in their education and the work they are encouraged to pursue, and mobilization of a united widows' group for advocacy purposes.

Group Four discussed the **Significance of Human Rights for the Protection of Widows' Rights – The Way Forward**. Their conversation focused on how to use general human rights statements as well as those statements specific to women's rights to support the widows' movement. Based on past declarations that ensure the equal rights of all persons without any form of discrimination, widows are entitled by their human rights to equality. In order to move widows' rights forward, group four suggested that they unite in a network to utilize the universal human rights as part of their personal rights. Further, group four encouraged government to rely on information from widows. Finally, the government should support educational programs to promote the status of widows within their family, community, and society.

*For detail, see Annex 10*

## Closing Remarks

The thematic session was concluded with remarks by **Mahendra Prasad Shrestha**, Secretary of Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare. Mr. Shrestha also stated and ensured that the government would support from its level to carry the widowhood issues and movement strategically.

## Kathmandu Declaration

After the thematic group discussion and presentation, the **Kathmandu Declaration** was presented in the conference. The Declaration will be used to raise greater awareness of widows' issues at the government level in order to address the needs of and provide support to widows.

### The 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.

With the enthusiastic support of all the participants of the conference, the Declaration was approved and is ready to bring widows' rights into both the National and International political arena.

*For detail, see Annex 11*



### Vote of Thanks

Lastly, on behalf of WHR, **Ajay Singh Karki**, Advisor of WHR delivered vote of thanks to all those who were present, participated

and provided support and hospitality for making the program successful. Addressing the closing of two days International Conference on Widowhood, he also announced of donating Rs. 4 from every sale of Pashmina (shawl) from his business for the Opportunity Fund of WHR.

## Conclusion

The conclusion of the conference marked the beginning of a new era for the widows' movement. During this conference, best practices were established for mobilizing widows to demand policy changes at the local, national, and international government levels. The effort to mainstream widows' rights as an international human rights instrument was united through several international organizations. Finally, a focused strategy was developed regarding how to empower widows culturally, economically, legally, and politically particularly in post conflict zones.

The conclusion of the International Conference on Widowhood "Widows' Voices–Empowered" is a symbolic first step on the journey to equalizing the rights of single women around the world.

# ANNEX

## Annex 1 Countries Represented in the Conference

- Afghanistan
- Australia
- Bangladesh
- Bhutan
- Germany
- India
- Italy
- Nepal
- Pakistan
- Scotland
- Sri Lanka
- United States of America
- United Kingdom



# Annex 2 Districts Represented in the Conference

## Eastern Development Region

- Bhojpur
- Dhankuta
- Ilam
- Jhapa
- Khotang
- Morang
- Panchthar
- Sankhuwashabha
- Saptari
- Siraha
- Sunsari
- Taplejung
- Terhathum
- Udayapur

## Central Development Region

- Bara
- Bhaktapur
- Chitwan
- Dhading
- Dhanusa
- Dolakha
- Kathmandu
- Kavre
- Lalitpur
- Mahottari
- Makwanpur
- Nuwakot
- Parsa
- Ramechhap
- Rasuwa
- Rautahat
- Sarlahi
- Sindhuli
- Sindhupalchowk

## Western Development Region

- Arghakhanchi
- Baglung
- Gorkha
- Gulmi
- Kapilbastu
- Kaski
- Lamjung
- Myagdi
- Nawalparasi
- Palpa
- Parbat
- Rupandehi
- Syanja
- Tanahu

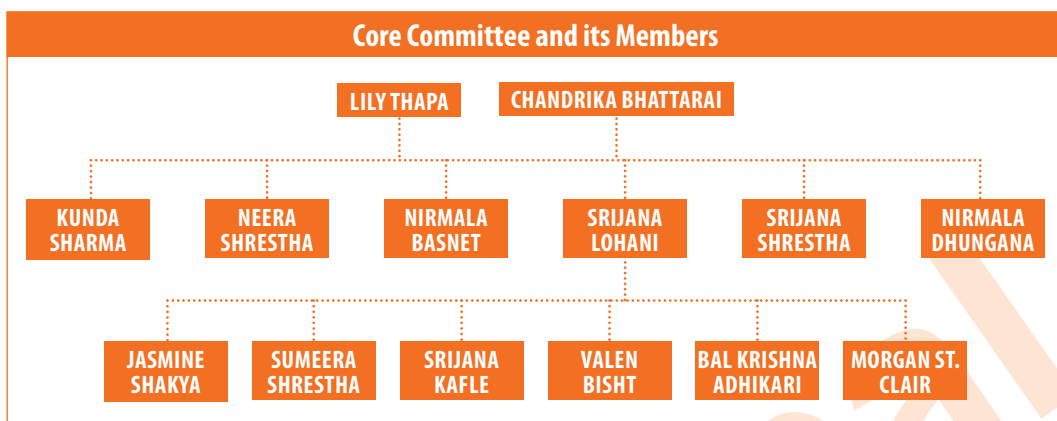
## Mid Western Development Region

- Banke
- Bardiya
- Dailekh
- Dang
- Jajarkot
- Jumla
- Kalikot
- Pyuthan
- Rolpa
- Salyan
- Surkhet

## Far Western Development Region

- Achham
- Baitadi
- Bajhang
- Bajura
- Dadeldhura
- Doti
- Kailali
- Kanchanpur

# Annex 3 Committee Members



<b>Other Committees and its Members</b>			
<b>SN</b>	<b>Committee</b>	<b>Responsible Persons</b>	<b>Designation</b>
1	Logistic Committee	Chandrika Bhattarai Srijana Shrestha Valen Bisht Deepa Khadka Anju Pariyar Bhagwati Satyal Devi Chapagain Ek Raj Mahat Kamala Maharjan Kamal Mahat Karma Sherpa Kusum Pokharel Lila Bhusel Manu Dahal Nisha Swar Poonum Pathak Prava Basnet Radha Gurung Ratna Chhetri Rekha Subedi	President Board Member SWEG Coordinator Program Officer Trainer Program Implementing Officer Support Staff Driver Program Implementing Officer Support Staff Driver Program Implementing Officer Support Staff Support Staff Support Staff Program Officer Program Officer Support Staff Support Staff Support Staff
2	Thematic Committee	Lily Thapa Kabita Pandey Neera Shrestha Nirmala Dhungana Pushpa Ghimire Srijana Lohani Sumeera Shrestha	Founder President Legal Expert HRD Coordinator General Secretary Life Member Program Manager Program Coordinator

SN	Committee	Responsible Persons	Designation
3	Inauguration Committee	Nirmala Dhungana Rajin Rayamajhi Shradha Pradhan	General Secretary Legal Officer Program Implementing Officer
4	Correspondence Committee	Lily Thapa Jasmine Shakya Morgan St. Clair Rosy Singh	Founder President Program Coordinator Volunteer Communication and Planning Officer
5	Finance Committee	Kunda Sharma Nirmala Basnet Bir Bahadur Thapa Chitra Raj Joshi Valen Bisht	Treasurer Vice Chairperson Finance Officer Finance Officer SWEG Coordinator
6	Publication and Documentation Committee	Lily Thapa Srijana Lohani Jasmine Shakya Morgan St. Clair Rosy Singh Sumeera Shrestha	Founder President Program Manager Program Coordinator Volunteer Communication and Planning Officer Program Coordinator
7	Administrative Committee	Bal Krishna Adhikari Laxman Gautam  Rojina Shrestha Srijana Kafle	Program Implementing Officer Asst. Communication and Documentation Officer Asst. Regional Coordinator Regional Coordinator
8	Kathmandu Declaration Committee	Margaret Owen Lily Thapa Kabita Pandey Rajin Rayamajhi	Director, WPD Founder President Legal Expert Legal Officer

# Annex 4 Schedule of the Conference

24 <sup>th</sup> June, 2010, Day 1							
9:00-9:30	Registration						
9:30- 9:35	Calling distinguished guests on Dais						
9:35-9:45	Welcome to Honorable Chief Guest						
9:45-9:50	Lighting of candles as formal start						
9:50-9:55	Welcome Speech						
9:55-10:00	Highlights of the Conference- <b>Lily Thapa</b> , Founder President of Women for Human Rights, single women group						
10:00- 10:30	<p><b>Key Note Speakers</b></p> <p><b>Honourable Minister Sarwadev Prasad Ojha</b>, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Nepal</p> <p><b>Anuradha Wickramasinghe</b>, President of Small Fishers Federation , Sri Lanka and Core Committee Member of South Asian Network for Widows' Empowerment in Development (SANWED)</p> <p><b>Dr. Mohini Giri</b>, Chairperson, Guild of Service, India</p> <p><b>Nain Kala Thapa</b>, Chairperson, National Women's Commission, Nepal</p> <p><b>Asta Laxmi Shakya</b>, Former Minister of Nepal</p>						
11:00-11:30	<p><b>Key Note Speakers</b></p> <p><b>Dr. Masuma Hasan</b>, Aurat Foundation, Pakistan and SANWED Member</p> <p><b>Amuda Shrestha</b>, Member of National Women's Commission, Nepal</p> <p><b>Lars Peter Christensen</b>, Program Coordinator DanidaHUGOU</p> <p><b>Margaret Owen</b>, Director of Widows for Peace through Democracy, U.K. and International Focal Person of SANWED</p>						
11:30- 11:40	Book Launch of " <b>A Journey Towards Empowerment and Status of Widows in Nepal</b> "						
11:40-	Remarks by the Chief Guest, <b>Honourable Minister Sarwadev Prasad Ojha</b>						
	Vote of Thanks by <b>Chandrika Bhattarai</b> , President, WHR						
12:00-13:00	Lunch						
13:00-16:30	<p><b>Country wise paper presentation</b></p> <p><b>Chair of the 1<sup>st</sup> session- Atmaram Pandey</b>, Joint Secretary, Planning Commission, Nepal</p> <p><b>Moderators – Helen Chandra and Srijana Lohani</b></p> <p>Country wise paper presentation with discussion</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>■ Afghanistan</td> <td>■ Bangladesh</td> <td>■ Germany</td> </tr> <tr> <td>■ Australia</td> <td>■ Bhutan</td> <td>■ India</td> </tr> </table>	■ Afghanistan	■ Bangladesh	■ Germany	■ Australia	■ Bhutan	■ India
■ Afghanistan	■ Bangladesh	■ Germany					
■ Australia	■ Bhutan	■ India					

	<p><b>Chair of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session- Kedar Poudel</b>, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Law and Justice</p> <p><b>Moderators- Sandy Ramsey and Nirmala Dhungana</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Italy</li> <li>■ Sri Lanka</li> <li>■ Nepal</li> <li>■ United Kingdom</li> <li>■ Pakistan</li> <li>■ United States of America</li> <li>■ Scotland</li> </ul>
16:30:16:30	Tea Break
16:30-	Documentary Show
<b>25<sup>th</sup> June, 2010, Day 2</b>	
<b>Time</b>	<b>Event</b>
6:30-8:30	<b>Heritage Walk</b> for Interested International Participants
8:30-9:30	Breakfast
9:30-11:30	<p><b>Chair of the session- Dr. Felix N. Sugirtharaj</b>, Hony. Secretary Coastal Poor Development Action Network, India and SANWED Core Committee Member</p> <p><b>Moderator- Dr. Bidya Nath Koirala</b></p>
	<p><b>Plenary Session</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>A Journey towards Widows Empowerment in Nepal</b> by Lily Thapa, Founder WHR</li> <li>■ <b>Mobilizing Widows at International Level</b> by Margaret Owen, Director, WPD, United Kingdom</li> <li>■ <b>Way Forward for advancement of widows in South Asia</b> by Dr. Mohini Giri, Founder Guild of Service, India</li> </ul>
11:30-13:00	<p><b>Group discussion on Four Thematic Session</b></p> <p><b>Moderators- Margaret Becker and Advocate Prakash Mani Sharma</b></p>
	<p><b>Group Discussions on Themes</b></p> <p><b>Group1- Role of widows in Peace building and Conflict Management</b></p> <p><b>Group 2- Resource Mobilization for Widows focusing on Millennium Development Goals</b></p> <p><b>Group 3- Mobilizing single women for reducing Gender Based Violence</b></p> <p><b>Group 4- Widowhood issues into International Human Rights agenda such as, CEDAW, BPFA, UNSCR 1325, 1880</b></p>
13:00-14:00	Lunch
14:00- 16:00	<p><b>Presentations and Discussions on Thematic Papers</b></p> <p><b>Chair of the session- Ratna Kaji Bajracharya</b>, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare</p> <p><b>Moderators- Margaret Becker and Advocate Prakash Mani Sharma</b></p>

	<p><b>Group1- Role of widows in Peace building and Conflict Management- Felix Neuhaus (Germany) and Nirmala Dhungana (Nepal)</b></p> <p><b>Group 2- Resource Mobilization for Widows focusing on Millennium Development Goals - Pushpa Ghimire ( Nepal) and Anindit Roy Chowdhury (India)</b></p> <p><b>Group 3- Mobilizing single women for reducing Gender Based Violence - Masuma Hasan ( Pakistan) and Srijana Lohani ( Nepal)</b></p> <p><b>Group 4- Widowhood issues into International Human Rights agenda such as, CEDAW, BPFA, UNSCR 1325, 1880- Margaret Owen (UK) and Advocate Kabita Pandey (Nepal)</b></p>
16:30- 16:30	Tea Break
16:30-18:00	<p><b>Kathmandu Declaration</b></p> <p><b>Chair of the Session- Mahendra Prasad Shrestha, Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Nepal</b></p> <p>Discussion on <b>Kathmandu Declaration on Widows</b> - Margaret Owen (UK) and Advocate Kabita Pandey ( Nepal)</p> <p><b>Finalization of Kathmandu Declaration and Press Meet</b></p>
18:00-18:30	<p><b>Closing session</b></p> <p>Remarks by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Mahendra Prasad Shrestha</b>, Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Nepal</li> <li>■ <b>Anuradha Wickramasinghe</b>, Chairman, Small Fishers Federation, Sri Lanka and SANWED Core Committee Member</li> </ul> <p><b>Vote of Thanks- Ajay Singh Karki</b>, Advisor, Women for Human Rights, single women group</p>
18:30- 20:00	High Tea and Photo Session

# Annex 5 Schedule of Heritage Walk

## Heritage Walk to Budanilkanth and Walk to Shivapuri- Najarjung National Park

**Date: 25<sup>th</sup> June 2010**

**Duration: 2 hour approx.**

In a few minute walking distance of Park Village, there is Asia's largest icon of Sleeping Vishnu, a massive sculpture carved in a huge monolith. Located here is a Deity of Lord Vishnu, Vishnu (Narayan) Jalasayana, lying on Ananta Sesa, in the cosmic ocean. The Deity is over 1,000 years old. It is believed that the deity was carved in the 7th or 8th century during the Lichhaavi period.

Within the walking distance of 30 minutes from the temple, we can reach the Shivapuri National Park (144 sq km). This is also the major

watershed supplying drinking water to the capital city of Kathmandu. The park is home to over 177 species of birds including 9 threatened species, over 100 species of butterflies including rare and threatened. Situated only 12 km to the north of Kathmandu, the park is the main entrance of the trekking routes to Gosainkunda, Helambu, Kagarkot and the Langtang National Park. Within 40 minutes walk from the entrance, we can reach Nagi Gumba (Monastery). The monastery is beautiful place to see and enjoy the scenic beauty of the park and the glimpse of the valley.

### The schedule

**6:00 am** – Gather in the lobby of the hotel

**6:10 am** – Set for the Shiv Puri National Park in the hotel's vehicle

**6:30 am** – Reach the entrance gate of the park and get in through

**6:30 am to 7:20 am** – Hike through the National Park enjoying the natural beauty

**7:20 am** – Reach the Nagi Gumba (Monastery)

**7:20 am to 7:50 am** – Take a look around the monastery and enjoy

**7:50 am** – Leave the monastery

**7:50 am to 8:10 am** – Walk back to the entrance

**8:10 am to 8:15 am** – Reach the Buddhanilkantha temple

**8:15 am to 8:25 am** – Go around the temple and sight seeing

**8:25 am to 8:30 am** – Reach the hotel

**8:30 am to 9:00 am** – Breakfast and get ready for the day



# Annex 6 List of Participants

SN	Name	Address	Affiliated Organization
1	Homaira Ferozi	Afghanistan	Women for Afghan Women
2	Margaret Becker	Australia	University of Adelaide
3	Sarah Homan	Australia	University of Adelaide
4	Rupa Subba	Bhutan	Bhutani Mahila Manch
5	Philipp Thien	Germany	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
6	Dr. Mohini Giri	India	Guild of Service
7	Dr. Deepali Bhanot	India	Guild of Service
8	Dr. Felix Sugirtharaj	India	Coastal Poor Development Action Network India
9	Helen Chandra	India	Centre of Association for Rural Education and Services (CARES)
10	Shilpa Kashelkar	India	Yuva
11	Anindit Roy Chowdhury	India	UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office
12	Francesca Osella	Italy	-
13	Stefania Nardin	Italy	Incontro fra I Popoli
14	Dr. Masuma Hasan	Pakistan	AURAT Foundation
15	Suzanne Solly	Scotland	University of Glassglow
16	Anuradha Wickramasinghe	Sri Lanka	Small Fishers Federation
17	Maj. Gen. Dr. Dudley Perera	Sri Lanka	Ranaviru Family Counseling & Support Service (RFCSS)
18	Margaret Owen	U.K.	Widows for Peace through Democracy
19	Jennie O Hara	U.K.	University of Manchester
20	Sandy Ramsey	U.S.A.	Crisis Recovery International
21	Beth Fairleigh	U.S.A.	Crisis Recovery International
22	Caitlin Macleod- Bluver	U.S.A.	-
23	Jake Stretton	England	-
24	Prof. Pam Rajput	India	South Asian Women's Watch
25	His Excellency Syed Abrar Hussain	Pakistan	Embassy of Pakistan
26	His Excellency Mr. Thosapala Hewage	Sri Lanka	Embassy of Sri Lanka
27	Sesath Thambugala	Sri Lanka	Embassy of Sri Lanka
28	Dr. Roshana Shrestha	Kathmandu	German Embassy
29	Bashanti Jha	Mahottari	CA Member

30	Dr. Khempo Lama	Narayanthan	CA Member
31	Jaya Puri Gharti	Rolpa	CA Member
32	Shanti Pakhrin	Dolakha	CA Member
33	Sita Poudel	Koteshwor	CA Member
34	Dolma Tamang	Sindhupalchowk	CPN- UML
35	Man Bahadur Thapa	Kathmandu	DC
36	Hari Bhakta Shruth	Babar Mahal	CTEVT
37	Nirendra Aryal	-	D.H.R. Nepal Army
38	Radhika Shrestha	Rupandehi	District Secretary
39	Lars Peter Christensen	Kathamandu	Danida HUGOU
40	Preeti Thapa	Baluwatar	The Asian Foundation
41	Shibesh Chandra Regmi	Baluwatar	World Neighbours
42	Srijana Adhikari	Bishalnagar	Women Act / CEDPA
43	Kalpana Karki	Chabahil	CSRC
44	Prakash Sharma	Kathmandu	PRO PUBLIC
45	Mitra Lal Dhungi	Thapathali	RiJ SiN
46	Usha Jha	Dhobighat	Samjhauta , Nepal
47	Bijaya Singh Gurung	Lalitpur	STEP-Nepal
48	Roshani Karmacharya	Lalitpur	STEP-Nepal
49	Shanti Nepali	Sanepa	Ujyaalo Nepal
50	Renu Shrestha	Kathmandu	WOREC, Nepal
51	Rangamati Shahi	Humla	WPS Nepal
52	Smriti Mallapati	Bhaisipati	-
53	Nites Mathew	Kathmandu	A TV
54	Manisha Gauchan	Mustang	A TV
55	Dilli Pandey	Sundhara	ABC TV
56	Ishwari Prasad Regmi	Gulariya,Bardiya	Babai M. Campus
57	Shiva	-	Gorkhapatra
58	Swikriti Poudel	Kathmandu	Image FM
59	Kalpana Ghimire	-	Kantipur Daily
60	David Mahat	Narayanthan	National News
61	Pratikshya	Chabahil	National TV

62	Rojina Thapa	Lokanthali	NBEX Mountain TV
63	Tara Dhakal	Kathmandu	Nepal TV
64	Dinesh Rajak	Kathmandu	Nepal TV, UK
65	Santoshi Adhikari	Anamnagar	Nepalbani Radio Network
66	Anusha Dhungana	Kathmandu	News 24
67	Dharma Raj Acharya	Pani Pokhari	News 24
68	Subarna Ghimire	Gongabu	NTV
69	Saroj Sharma	Dang	NTV
70	Sobha Shrestha	-	NTV
71	Subarna Ghimire	-	NTV
72	Birendra Saud	Kathmandu	NTV 2
73	Sajana Bista	Bagbazaar	Padma Kanya
74	Roshani Pradhan	Bagbazaar	Padma Kanya Campus
75	Ama Vaidya	Bagbazaar	Padma Kanya College
76	Pushpa Ghimire	Bhaktapur	Padma kanya College
77	Saraswoti Niraula	Bhaktapur	Pashupati Campus
78	Usha Wasti (Niraula)	Bhaktapur	Pashupati Campus
79	Bishnu Taruko	Balaju	Saptahik
80	Laxmi Oli	Dhapasi	St. Xavier's College
81	Naresh Chitrakar	Nayabazaar	The Himalayan Times
82	Nirjana Sharma	Tinkune	The Kathmandu Post
83	Pragya Lamsal	Bishalnagar	The Rising Nepal
84	Dr. Bidya Nath Koirala	Kirtipur	TU
85	Naba Raj Mudwari	Kathmandu	TU
86	Rudra Bhutel	Kathmandu	TU
87	Shiva Gurung	Jawalakhel	TU
88	Ravi Joshi	Lamjung	TU, Gender studies
89	Santa Nepali	Sanepa	Ujyaalo FM
90	Binju Sitaula	Hattisar	Xinhua News Agency
91	Lily Thapa	Baluwatar	WHR
92	Aastha Bohara	Swayambhu	WHR

93	Anju Pariyar	Chabahil	WHR
94	Bal Krishna Adhikari	Balaju	WHR
95	Battisa Maharjan	Dharmasthali	WHR
96	Bhagawati Satyal	Kavre	WHR
97	Bijay Dhakal	Bagbazaar	WHR
98	Bina Thapa	Kathmandu	WHR
99	Binita Tamang	Baneshwor	WHR
100	Biru Thapa	Dhumbarahi	WHR
101	Bishnu Maya Panday	Chitwan	WHR
102	Chandrika Bhattarai	Kupondol	WHR
103	Chitra Raj Joshi	Baluwatar	WHR
104	Deepa Khadka	New Baneshwor	WHR
105	Devi Chapagai	Kathmandu	WHR
106	Durga Neupane	Pokhara	WHR
107	Indra Kala Rai	Sunsari	WHR
108	Jasmine Shakya	Baluwatar	WHR
109	Kabita Pandey	Baneshwor	WHR
110	Kamala Maharjan	Naradevi	WHR
111	Kusum Pokharel	-	WHR
112	Laxman Gautam	Kathmandu	WHR
113	Laxmi Hajur Shah	Swayambhu	WHR
114	Laxmi Pokharel	Koteshwor	WHR
115	Lila Bhujel	Chabahil	WHR
116	Maheswori Nath Yogi	Ghattekulo	WHR
117	Manu Kafle	Kathmandu	WHR
118	Nanda Shrestha	Surkhet	WHR
119	Neera Shrestha	Lalitpur	WHR
120	Nirmala K.C	New Baneshwor	WHR
121	Nirmala Basnet	Kathmandu	WHR
122	Nisha Swar	Mahankal	WHR
123	Poonam Pathak	Baneshwor	WHR
124	Prativa Bista	Lagankhel	WHR

125	Prava Basnet	-	WHR
126	Radha Gurung	Dhumabara	WHR
127	Rajin Rayamajhi	Baluwatar	WHR
128	Ramita Karki	Bhaktapur	WHR
129	Ratna Chhetri	Kuleshor	WHR
130	Rekha subedi	Kailali	WHR
131	Reshma Thapa	Naxal	WHR
132	Rojina Shrestha	Baluwatar	WHR
133	Roshana Maskey	Koteshwor	WHR
134	Rosy Singh	Badikhel	WHR
135	Sangeet Regmi	Baneshwor	WHR
136	Saraswoti Nath Yogi	Ghattekulo	WHR
137	Saraswoti Pandey	Kailali	WHR
138	Shanti Thapa	Naxal	WHR
139	Shanti Upadhyaya	Khumaltar	WHR
140	Srijana Basnet	Dhobighat	WHR
141	Srijana Kafle	Baluwatar	WHR
142	Srijana Lohani	Baneshwor	WHR
143	Srijana Shrestha	Kirtipur	WHR
144	Suman Bhandari	Kathmandu	WHR
145	Sumeera Shrestha	Nepal	WHR
146	Sushila Acharya	Nepal	WHR
147	Tara Dahal	Sanepa	WHR
148	Tika Maya Jirel	Jorpati	WHR
149	Valen Bista	Kathmandu	WHR
150	Yashodha Niraula	Jhapa	SWG
151	Yam Kumari Dhakal	Dang	SWG
152	Yagya Kumari Tuladhar	Dolakha	SWG
153	Ved Awasthi	Kailali	SWG
154	Uma Gurung	Taplejung	SWG
155	Tulasa Acharya	Rolpa	SWG
156	Tikeshwori Hamal	Kailali	SWG

157	Tika Mishra	Chitwan	SWG
158	Tara Devkota	Sindhuli	SWG
159	Sushma Mudathari	Rautahat	SWG
160	Sushila	-	SWG
161	Sumitra Shrestha	Sunsari	SWG
162	Suman Shrestha	Salyan	SWG
163	Suman Sharma	Kailali	SWG
164	Sobha Dahal	Udaypur	SWG
165	Sobha B.C	Nepalgunj	SWG
166	Sita Shrestha	Nawalparasi	SWG
167	Sita Dhakal	Parsa	SWG
168	Shradha Pradhan Shrestha	Nepalgunj	SWG
169	Shanta Gurung	Sankhuwasabha	SWG
170	Shanta Devi Ghimire	Lamjung	SWG
171	Sashi Bhatta	Dharmasthali	SWG
172	Sarita Shrestha	Doti	SWG
173	Sarita Shai	Kavre	SWG
174	Sarita Sapkota	Kavre	SWG
175	Saraswoti Rijal	Panchthar	SWG
176	Saraswoti Acharya	Pyuthan	SWG
177	Sanju Timalisina	Jumla	SWG
178	Sabita Rai	Sunsari	SWG
179	Rupa Subba	Belangdi-1	SWG
180	Rubina Chaudhary	Lahan	SWG
181	Rina Pokharel	Dailekh	SWG
182	Rekha Hamal	Kailali	SWG
183	Ram Kumari Thapa	Surkhet	SWG
184	Ram Devi Tamang	Kavre	SWG
185	Radhika Shrestha	Rupandehi	SWG
186	Radha Bhandari	Kavre	SWG
187	Radha Adhikari	Makwanpur	SWG
188	Puspha Lata Lama	Dhanusa	SWG



189	Prava Chaudhary	Siraha	SWG
190	Pramila Tajhya	Kaski	SWG
191	Pramila Sapkota	Ramechhap	SWG
192	Pramila Ghimire	Ramechhap	SWG
193	Pramila B.ka	Baglung	SWG
194	Parsi Buda	Bajura	SWG
195	Padma B.Ka	Achham	SWG
196	Nhuchhe Maya Naga	Dharmasthali	SWG
197	Mina Pantha	Gulmi	SWG
198	Mayer Devi Sharma	Dhading	SWG
199	Maya Subedi	Tansen, Palpa	SWG
200	Maya Devi Sharma	Dhading	SWG
201	Mathura Pant	Kanchanpur	SWG
202	Mathura Chaigadi	Achham	SWG
203	Mangala Devi Shrestha	Bardiya	SWG
204	Mangala Devi Sharma	Saptari	SWG
205	Man Maya Shakya	Sindhupalchowk	SWG
206	Maina Karki Rawal	Jajarkot	SWG
207	Maheshora Bajracharya	Sankhuwasabha	SWG
208	Laxmi Shrestha	Barabise	SWG
209	Laxmi Aryal	Arghakhachi	SWG
210	Khum Kumari Thapa	-	SWG
211	Ketan Khadka	Basundhara	SWG
212	Kamala Baral	Sanepa	SWG
213	Kalpana Mahat	Kapilvastu	SWG
214	Kabita Thapa	Taplejung	SWG
215	Juna Sunar	Kalikot	SWG
216	Juna K.C	Kaski	SWG
217	Juna	Jumla	SWG
218	Jhamka Kumari Dhital	Sarlahi	SWG
219	Jaya Rai	Dhankuta	SWG
220	Ishwori Chapagai	Syangja	SWG

221	Hari Bhakta Shrestha	Babar Mahal	SWG
222	Goma Poudel	Chitwan	SWG
223	Geeta Suji	Surkhet	SWG
224	Geeta Rawat	Bhaktapur	SWG
225	Funna Maya Shrestha	Bode	SWG
226	Ek Maya B.Ka	Banke	SWG
227	Durga Devi Darlami	Surkhet	SWG
228	Dipa Acharya	Illam	SWG
229	Dhana Prasai	-	SWG
230	Dhana	Dhangadi	SWG
231	Dewaki Joshi	Bajhang	SWG
232	Devi Pudasaini	Nuwakot	SWG
233	Devi Poudel	Nuwakot	SWG
234	Dawa Sharma	Dang	SWG
235	Chuda Bhattarai	Morang	SWG
236	Chinmaya Gurung	Tanahu	SWG
237	Chema Sharma	Dang	SWG
238	Chandra Kala Gurung	Maiti Devi	SWG
239	Bimala Shrestha	Tehrathum	SWG
240	Bimala Parajuli	Saptari	SWG
241	Bima Jha	Mahottari	SWG
242	Bhumika Acharya	Illam	SWG
243	Bhawani Kharel	Nawalparasi	SWG
244	Bhagirathi Sharma	Saptari	SWG
245	Basanti Ghatani	Illam	SWG
246	Archana Lama	Rasuwa	SWG
247	Anjana K.C	Khala	SWG
248	Anita Devkota	Saptari	SWG
249	Amrita Gurung	Tanahu	SWG
250	Ajita Sharma	Parbat	SWG
251	Biny Karki	New Baneshwor	-
252	Monica Narayan	Budhanilkantha	-
253	R Kittel	Kathmandu	-

# Annex 7 Keynote Speakers, Chairs, Moderators and Facilitators

## Keynote Speakers

1. **Honourable Minister Sarwadev Prasad Ojha**, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Nepal
2. **Amuda Shrestha**, Member of National Women's Commission, Nepal
3. **Anuradha Wichramasinghe**, President of Small Fishers Federation, Sri Lanka and Core Committee Member of SANWED.
4. **Astalaxmi Shakya**, the Former Minister of Nepal.
5. **Dr. Masuma Hasan**, Board Member of AURAT Foundation and member of SANWED, Pakistan.
6. **Dr. Mohini Giri**, Chairperson, Guild of Service, India
7. **Lars Peter Christensen**, Program Coordinator, DanidaHUGOU.
8. **Margaret Owen**, Director of WPD, U.K. and International Focal Person of SANWED.
9. **Nainkala Thapa**, Chairperson of National Women's Commission, Nepal.
10. **Lily Thapa**, Founder President, WHR

## Chairs of the Session

1. **Mahendra Prasad Shrestha**, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Nepal.
2. **Ratna Kaji Bajracharya**, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Nepal.
3. **Kedar Poudel**, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Law and Justice, Nepal.
4. **Atmaram Pandey**, Joint Secretary, Planning Commission, Nepal.
5. **Dr. Felix N. Sugirtharaj**, Hony. Secretary Coastal Poor Development Action Network, India and SANWED Core Committee Member.

## Moderators

1. **Dr. Bidya Nath Koirala**, M.Phil Program Coordinator, Nepal
2. **Dr. Deepali Bhanot**, Life Member of Guild of Service, India
3. **Helen Chandra**, Executive Secretary of Centre of Association for Rural Education and Services (CARES), India
4. **Margaret Becker**, from University of Adelaide, Australia.
5. **Nirmala Dhungana**, General Secretary, WHR, Nepal
6. **Prakash Mani Sharma**, Advocate, Executive Director of ProPublic
7. **Srijana Lohani**, Program Manager, WHR, Nepal

## Facilitators

1. **Anindit Roy Chowdhury**, Regional Resource Mobilization Officer of UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office, India
2. **Dr. Masuma Hasan**, Board Member of AURAT Foundation and member of SANWED, Pakistan
3. **Felix Neuhaus**, DED Nepal
4. **Kabita Pandey**, Legal Expert, WHR, Nepal.
5. **Margaret Owen**, Director of WPD, U.K. and International Focal Person of SANWED.
6. **Nirmala Dhungana**, General Secretary, WHR, Nepal
7. **Puspa Ghimire**, Life Member, WHR, Nepal
8. **Srijana Lohani**, Program Manager, WHR, Nepal

# Annex 8 Country Paper Presentations

## Country Paper Presentation by Homaira Ferozi

Educational Coordinator of Women for Afghan Women **AFGHANISTAN**



- About 90 percent of Afghan widows have children, and the average widow has more than four.
- The average age of an Afghan widow is just 35 years, and 94 percent of them are unable to read and write.
- To survive many Afghan widows weave carpets, do tailoring, or beg.



### Challenges Widows Face

- Afghan women in general and widows in particular do not have a voice to express their problems
- Most of the widows have no right to live independently.
- Around 96% of widows are illiterate.

### Nasima's Short Story

Nasima is 35 years old widow. Her husband died 3 years ago, she has 6 children and she lives with her brother in law's family. Brother in law says to Nasima I have 4 options for you:

- Please marriage with my one year old son.
- Or marriage with my 15 years old son.
- Or marriage with me
- Or put your children with me and you go with your father.



### Women for Afghan Women

- Established in US 2001
- Start of activity in Afghanistan 2007
- Family Guidance Center and Shelter
- Served over 1600 women up to now

### Widow's live in Afghanistan

- There are over 1.5 million widows out of an estimated 26.6 million people in Afghanistan.
- 65 percent of the 50,000 widows in Kabul see suicide the only option to get rid of their miseries and desolation.

WAW's case workers took Nasima with 6 children from unreasonable brother in law's family and put to women for Afghan women's shelter. We try to solve the problem with mediation.

*Homaira Ferozi is from Afghanistan and she is the educational coordinator in Women for Afghan Women.*

# Country Paper Presentation by: Margaret Becker

## From University of Adelaide AUSTRALIA

### The Category of Widow in Australian Public Policy

While women whose husbands died at war have been officially recognized as widows since 1917 following WWI, it was not until 1942 that the category of 'widow' was enshrined in public policy for civilian widows. However, in the late 1980s civilian widows became identified as sole parent pensioners or unemployed. Nevertheless, the category 'war widow' continues to the present day.

#### Government Benefits for Widows

Since 1917 war widows in Australia have been eligible for subsistence pensions. However in 1942 the Australian Government introduced income support for all widows. Nevertheless, from the beginning the name of the payment was misleading. It was designed to assist women who had lost a partner and could not be expected to engage in employment due to child care responsibilities or age.

Not all women in this category were eligible for the widows' pension. De facto widows, deserted wives, divorced women and women whose husbands were in institutions for the insane were included but single mothers, wives of prisoners, women deserted by de facto husbands and women who had deserted their husband or agreed to separate were excluded. In addition, there was a requirement that pension recipients be of 'good character' and 'deserving of a pension', thus reflecting the moral standards of the day.

Subsequent amendments, most notably in 1974 when the Supporting Mothers' Benefit was introduced, extended the coverage to include deserted de facto wives, unmarried mothers and other lone mothers who had not previously been eligible for a Widows' Pension.

The dismantling of the various widow pensions at the end of the 1980s marked the end of a transition from payments for 'respectable' widows - with a few categories of less reputable sole parents hidden under the umbrella term widow pension - to payments based on the objective fact recent death of a partner.

#### Associations for Widows in Australia

With the formation of the War Widows' Guild of Australia in 1947 and the Association for Civilian Widows in 1949 there has been significant expansion of the widows' pension. Both strove to win income security for war widows and civilian widows. For example, pressure from the War Widows' Guild resulted in the continuation and expansion of benefits including medical, dental and optical benefits and payment for the educational costs of children.

The pension for war widows was significantly higher than a civilian widow's pension until 1970 when the base rate for both was equalised. However, other differences have continued. For instance, the war widows pension is not means tested and certain benefits are only available to war widows.

#### Statistics Relating to Widows in Australia

The 2001 Australian census reveals that 75% of persons widowed in Australia are women.

Research suggests that there is a higher probability of a marriage ending due to the death of the husband than due to the death of a wife. For couples marrying in 2000-2002 the probability of a marriage ending due to the death of the husband was 48%. Over the same period the probability of a marriage ending due to the death of the wife was much lower at 20%.

“The higher probability that a marriage would end due to the death of the husband relative to the death of the wife can partly be attributed to the age difference between husband and wife at marriage, and the longer life expectancy of women in Australia”.

Widowhood in Australia currently occurs at an older age than in the past. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2000–2002, the average age of women entering widowhood was 75 years, six years older than in 1985–1987 where the average age was 69 years. There is an increasing tendency among widowed persons not to remarry after the end of marriage. The average duration that men could expect to spend in widowhood was 9 years for men becoming widowed in 2000–2002. Over the same period the expected years of life spent in widowhood for women was 15 years.

## Material, Personal, Family, and Social Well Being of Widows with Dependent Children

Following the death of their husband, widows undergo dramatic changes that place them at risk. While many widows are entitled to insurance payments, they do not have to split assets, and many retain their family homes, ‘they experience upheavals that are among the most stressful of life events [experiencing] decrements in mental and physical health following the loss of their husbands’. ‘Widows generally experience an unwanted, irreparable, and uncontrollable loss. Particularly for younger widows with children,

being bereft by the untimely death of a spouse can result in long periods of depression’.

Research that looked at the long-term well-being of 21 widows with dependent children in terms of material, personal, family and social well-being reveals that loneliness was the most commonly occurring problem. While “it appeared that most widows in the study were satisfied with the number of acquaintances and family members who were available for social activities, many lacked close friends with whom they could share their private feelings”. The report suggests that the best predictor of their happiness was the frequency of close, personal conversations with friends.

## Conclusion

Widows in Australia have long since received income support from the Australian Government, however the criteria to be eligible for the widows’ pension was quite narrow up until the early 1970s when it was broadened to encompass many more women such as women deserted by their de facto husbands and single mothers. Since the late 1980s only those women who constitute the definition of ‘war widow’ receive a widows’ pension while civilian widows are identified as sole parent pensioners or unemployed. Nevertheless, regardless of the way in which Australian public policy defines the term ‘widow’, the upheavals and stresses that women experience following the death of their husband are often enormous and painful, affecting both their mental and physical health.

*Margaret Becker is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at the University of Adelaide, South Australia and holds a Commonwealth Australian Postgraduate Award, First Class Honors in Anthropology and BA (Arts) from the same institution. She was awarded the University Medal in August 2009 and listed first on the Order of Merit List for Postgraduate Students at the University of Adelaide in December 2008. She has conducted research as part of an Australian Research Council Linkage Project analyzing policies to encourage the development of gender inclusivity and has contributed to research and publications outputs within the context of United Kingdom Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project ‘Tuning-in: Diasporic Contact Zones at the BBC World Service’.*



# Country Paper Presentation by: Ferdous Ara Begum

## Member, UN CEDAW Committee

### Creating Widows Rights in the CEDAW Framework

Widowhood in many countries represents a social death to women, young or old who lost their husbands due to death. Widowhood in both developed and developing countries more or less marked as people to be shunned and avoided. They are systematically marginalized through the social attitudes and interpretations of customs and religion. The vernacular words for widows, across cultures, are often synonymous with witch or prostitute. Widows are regarded as the lowest of all women, and are most vulnerable to physical, sexual and psychological abuse both within their families and in the community. Widows in conflict and post conflict scenarios are particularly at risk. Governments are obligated to address such stigmatization.

Widowhood from the perspective of early marriage, war or arm conflict, extreme poverty; discriminatory social, religious or customary laws and practices can be seen as a great vulnerability and social isolation, misery and disgrace for widows. In the patriarchal society widows are discriminated most as they are deprived of their rights to the inherited property, income and are mostly dependent on men throughout their lives, from their fathers through to husbands, brothers or sons. The Constitution affirms gender equality in most countries but state legislation and institutions frequently disregard women's rights. In many countries widows' lives are determined exclusively at the local level under patriarchal custom and discriminatory interpretations of religion.

Social discrimination against widows of Hindu Community in Bangladesh is a serious concern. They are deprived of their economic rights. They have no right to the family property and remain mostly in social isolation in the male dominated society and have no choice but to depend on their male relatives. Despite all the hardship and social injustice, their vulnerable status

remains under reported and unaddressed by the government. The NGOs are also not doing enough to help them.

Bangladesh has the highest rate of early marriage in Asia. A 2004 United Nations report estimated that 48 per cent of all girls between 15 and 19 years of age were married, divorced or widowed. Traditionally, parents marry their daughters young to decrease the economic burden on the household.

Widowhood for women over 60 is most prevalent in Northern Africa and Central Asia. About 10% of women in India are widows, compared to only 3% of men according to 1991 census. Widowhood, along with poverty, illiteracy, childlessness, social isolation and displacement, put widows of all ages at risk of physical, sexual or verbal abuse and neglect. In India young, child or older widows are mostly treated as a social outcast, many of them are sexually exploited. In rural areas widows are sent to the holy temples to live rest of their lives. Their food, clothing and life style are very much dictated by religious doctrines.

The Government of Bangladesh adopted a new social protection mechanism to benefit poor widows and divorced women including destitute women, which is called allowances for widows, divorced and distressed women. This programme has already demonstrated improvement in the economic condition of widows. Family pension also introduced for widows whose husbands worked in the public sector. Issuance of voter identification cards for all adults, both male and female has generated a sense of security for women including widows.

In some regions of Africa especially in Mozambique, Tanzania, Ghana and Burkina Faso older widows are often subjected to accusations

of witchcraft which can result in psychological abuse, violence and in extreme cases, killing of older widows. Research shows that child mortality and morbidity, gender inequality and social exclusion of older widows, plus lack of awareness of widow's rights, are the key underlying factors for witchcraft accusations. In eastern Congo half of the adult women are either widows or wives of the disappeared man.

In January 2010, at the 45th CEDAW session in Geneva, older widow's issues were raised by the committee members, especially in the case of Malawi, where the issues included witchcraft allegations, mob trials, and killing of older widows in order to grab their property.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a living instrument to protect the human rights of all women including widows as it is mandated to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women throughout their lifespan.

The Convention focuses on discrimination, as women tend to suffer disproportionately from various forms of discrimination. Widowhood makes this situation more complex. To ensure widows's enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, States Parties as a party to the convention are under the obligation to respect, protect, promote and fulfill these rights.

However, despite the Committee's concern for the situation of widows, their rights are not systematically addressed either in State reports or NGO shadow reports. In the majority of cases, widows and the discrimination they experience remain invisible

This is essential for Governments to collect and analyze statistical data disaggregated by sex and age as a way to assess more effectively their living conditions, the incidence of poverty among them and violence against them, as well as to implement gender sensitive policies with a life-cycle approach to widow's of all ages to ensure their economic and social well-being and empowerment. Their right to the property must be ensured. In the war and arm conflict zone war widows must be incorporated in all policies and programmes under the Security Council Resolution 1325 and 1820.

Again widows are not a homogeneous group. There are child widows due to early marriage, young widows and older widows. They have great diversity of experiences, knowledge, ability and skill. Their economic and social situation however is dependent on a range of demographic, political, environmental, cultural, economical, individual and family factors. Policy makers need to recognize this reality and take it into account.

**Ferdous Ara Begum** is currently a Member of UN CEDAW Committee (Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) and National Council for Women's Development, Bangladesh, and Gender Issues Specialist. She received her Master in Public Administration in 1983 from John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, United States of America. She completed a nine month Certificate Course in Development Administration in 1980 from Princeton University, United States of America. In 1970, she completed a Master in Economics from University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. She has experience in a wide range of areas, having held the following titles: Member, Board of Directors, Grameen Bank, Expert Consultant on Gender Issues, UNFPA, General, Bangladesh Television, Additional Secretary, Government of Bangladesh, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Government of Bangladesh Director General, Department of Women Affairs, Commissioner of Taxes, National Board of Revenue, Government of Bangladesh.

# Country Paper Presentation by: Rupa Subba

Member of Bhutani Mahila Manch **BHUTAN**

## A Glimpse of Single Women in Bhutanese Refugee Camp

The Bhutanese name for Bhutan, "Druk Yul", means "Land of the Thunder Dragon" and it only began to open up to outsiders in the 1970s. Thimpu is the capital city of Bhutan, a land locked country. The total population of Bhutan is about 7,00,000. The dominant groups of Bhutanese population are Lhotsampas (Southern Bhutanese), Sarchhops (Easterners) and Ngalongs (Westerners – the ruling group). 75% people follow Mahayana Buddhist and 25% Indian and Nepalese influenced Hinduism. Although there are 14 other languages spoken including Nepali dialects, Dzongkha is the official language of Bhutan. In 1907, Ugyen Wangchuck was coronated as the first king and is still among the few monarchial country. Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck is the recent fifth king of Bhutan.

Since 1990 Bhutan initiated people's movement towards democracy. By the end of 1990s, attempts to stress the majority Buddhist culture and the lack of any political representation had led to deep resentment among the ethnic Nepali community in the South. Violence erupted and 1,00,000 Nepali speakers fled to refugee

camps in Nepal. Many Nepalese descendents were displaced from Bhutan and forced to live struggling life of refugees. Thus they were compelled to live under the protection of UNHCR. Many women lost their husbands during conflict and even became the victim of sexual violence. Among 1,00,000 refugees about 10,000 women are widows. Under third country re-settlement program which was initiated in 2007, about 5,000 widows have been settled in third countries.

The condition of widows is vulnerable in the refugee camps. They are suffering from many problems regarding economic, health, security, mental and psychological trauma. Due to the social stigma they are bound inside the household chores leading to suppression of their voices towards rights and equality. Among the organizations working for refugees, Bhutanese Refugee Women Forum is one of the leading organizations which has been working for vulnerable women including widows. It has focused on empowering their lives through life skill trainings as tailoring, boutique, animal husbandry, saving and credit programs etc.

*Rupa Subba is originally from Bhutan and at present living in Bhutanese Refugee Camp at Jhapa, Nepal.*

# Country Paper Presentation by: Philipp Thien

From Friedrich Ebert Stiftung GERMANY

## Widows in Germany

### Introduction

In every society in the world, widows are a common phenomenon but in some areas they are treated as objects. The term marginalized has been used to describe such situations, but it does not describe the inhumanity many groups of people are facing in the world. Just societies do not create boundaries or hatred between its peoples because of gender, marital status, sexual orientations, mental or physical capabilities. Only by treating "the marginalized" as subjects of their own life, a society can evolve to a more human, just and prosperous society.

This article addresses the lives of widows in Germany, their socio-economic position and their legal entitlements concerning pensions. The basis for the information presented is provided by official publications from the relevant ministry.

### Widows in Germany

When speaking about the lives of widows in Germany, it is impossible to compare their situation with widows situated in some areas of Nepal for example. The former do not need to show their status of widowhood in terms of their clothes. They are also not excluded from societal and family events. It is rather the case that the majority of widows receive respect from their family members whereas the society has at least a feeling of empathy for them. For example, because their life expectancy is slightly higher on average in general, many women take care for their husbands until the very last breath, which is a physical and especially mentally demanding effort. This is just one of the reasons for the respect they deserve.

Widows in Germany are not discriminated against in legal terms and no cultural practice discriminates them because they are widows.

But in terms of pensions for bereaved persons for example, it took the German state a considerable time to recognize that widows deserve the same rights as their male counterparts. In the beginning of the welfare state, after destroyed Germany has been rebuilt in large parts by women and by many widows (the so-called Trümmerfrauen) who lost their husbands in the battlefield Europe, widows and widowers were not treated equally. This situation also continued when the German society experienced strong economic growth in the 50s and 60s, the beginning of the second wave of feminism. It took until 1985 that female and male widowed pensioners were treated equally concerning the pension for bereaved persons. This underlines that every country, if considered rich or poor, has to contemplate continuously about society in order to make it just and fair.

So how does the situation look today? According to the latest analysis of the family ministry which compared the situation with the previous analysis of 1991, it states that a positive trend concerning the financial situation of widows can be witnessed. This can be attributed to the social policies been adopted and implemented by the welfare state over the last decades.

### Pension Entitlements

While talking about the pension entitlements of female widows, it is to be said that the widow pension is part of the general German insurance system which is too complex to elaborate in detail. The widow pension is divided into the categories small and big, applicable to both women and men alike. The former applies when a widow is aged below 45. If she has to take care for a child or can only work in a restricted manner, for example less than three hours a day because

of handicap, it is possible to apply for a big widow pension. These conditions have been chosen because first of all, there are also young mothers who became widows early and need social security in order to take care for their children. Second, although the numbers of women being dependent on the husband's income are constantly declining and the exception in Germany, some widows cannot work full-time and face increased vulnerability. In this case, the possibility to receive the big pension allows them to secure their living standard. Financially, the small pension means to receive 25% of the deceased person's income for a maximum of two years whereas the big pension accumulates to 55% with no time restrictions.

Because of the financial burden to take care for children, this is taken into account concerning the big pension as well. For each child an amount of approximately 25€ is added to the monthly pension. So Germany's welfare state is protecting widows to a great extent. Especially the possibility to receive the big widow pension when not able to work full-time or having to take care for children secures widow's and their respective children's living standards. Moreover, if a widow receives the big pension, it usually means that she also receives the general old age pension in addition. That means that in total, the monthly contributions from the pension scheme can be 2.200 euro maximum, although

this is a theoretical figure and rarely achieved. It is because of the vigorous social security system and the millions of tax payers contributing to it, that vulnerable groups such as widows are protected against the insecurities associated with modern human life.

### Future Outlook

But concerns about the future of the German welfare state are growing because of the demographic and economic changes, for example the tendency to create part-time jobs. In 2002, 17 percent of the population was 65 years old or older and until 2050, the percentage is expected to rise up to 30 percent. This puts the whole system of the "generation contract" where the young pay for the old into question. It can only work when a society has a larger number of young and employed people who pay their taxes than there are pensioners. Therefore with the current developments in mind, every citizen will have to save individually for their pension, in addition to the state pension. The state already advocates this approach by facilitating private pension schemes with the so-called "Riester-Rente".

In the future, to save in a private scheme in addition to the state pension will become the standard, and widows will be affected by this, too, as every equal citizen in Germany.

**Philipp Thien** is working at a German organization named Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES).

# Country Paper Presentation by: Dr. Deepali Bhanot

Life Member of Guild of Service INDIA

## Status of Widows in India

### Introduction

Widows in India share many things in common. In a patriarchal society the extent of gender specific violence that the widows face varies in accordance to the socio-cultural norms prevalent in the region, but it cuts across class, caste and religion in the entire strata of the society across the nation. Despite the many privileges and rights enjoyed by educated women in the metropolitan cities, women all over India are discriminated against and are the victims of many prejudices, neglect, deprivation and exploitation. Widowhood is the worst period of a woman's life. With the death of her husband the status of a woman in the family and society reduces significantly and she is looked down upon with contempt.

Almost all widows in India are confronted with socio-cultural discrimination, economic deprivation and emotional crisis but the situation of a Hindu widow is much more worse than the widows from other faith traditions as the patriarchal oppression and the unfair treatment meted out to her has the sanction of tradition and the scriptures. The elderly widow is especially vulnerable and marginalised. She dwells forever on the fringes of the society and remains invisible. She is associated with ill-luck and her problems are not considered important enough to be heeded. It is indeed a sad situation for her when even the women in the family turn against her. She is unwanted in her natal home and she receives hostile treatment at her marital home. As a young widow her sexuality becomes a threat to the other women and she is considered to be an additional burden on the family resources.

### Linguistic Violence

A widow not only suffers the emotional crisis due to bereavement, isolation and social

neglect but also become the victims of violence in the form of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, economic deprivation and injustice. She is subjected to linguistic violence through many harsh and abusive words. Her morality remains suspect and she is often rebuked with harsh words for bringing ill-luck to the family.

### Restrictions on Behaviour

A widow is considered to be inauspicious and is not allowed to participate in any auspicious occasions and festivities like the wedding ceremonies. She is supposed to work hard to keep herself useful but all kinds of enjoyment and merry-making is denied to her. She is supposed to be in a state of perpetual mourning in order to atone for the sin of having outlived her husband. There are restrictions on her movement and actions leaving her with little freedom of choice with regard to her livelihood.

### Restrictions on Diet and Attire

A widow is supposed to live a life of self-denial with meagre intake of food. A number of fasts are prescribed for her so that she may atone for her sins of her widowhood.

After the death of her husband, her status as a married woman in the society is brought to an end very unceremoniously and all signs of wifehood are ripped off from her body.

### Economic Deprivation

In a patriarchal society the widow is forever dependant on the men in the family. A number of widows have to take up some job due to economic pressures. But it is not always possible to get suitable jobs. Due to the various financial



problems the women are not able to maintain their previous standards of living or to look after their children's needs, meet personal expenses and the basic necessities of life. Very often a widow has to run the household on her own and has to bear the burden of bread-earning, home-making and child-rearing all by herself.

In most of the cases the widows usually are ignorant about their husbands' financial status, their assets and liabilities, bank accounts, loans, bonds, certificates, insurance policies and so on. As a result they are duped by their own dishonest family members and friends who wish to acquire the property or assets of their deceased husband.

In the rural areas even if a widow gains right over the land, she has no knowledge of how to till the land. She cannot wield the ploughshare so she has no choice but to depend on the male members of the family in sowing, harvesting, selling the crops and handling the money matters. Thus she has no control over the finances.

### Laws of Inheritance

Even though the Personal laws for inheritance are different for Hindus, Muslims and Christians, the property rights are mostly in favour of the male members of the family because even though the widow has a right to the property (The Hindu Succession Act 1956), the moveable and immovable assets are still controlled by men. Moreover a daughter is always socialised not to stake a claim in parental property in order to maintain a cordial relationship with her natal family.

### Widow Remarriage

Widow Remarriage was legalised by the Hindu Widows Remarriage Act, 1856. But according to this Act provided that all the rights that a widow had on her dead husband's property would "cease to exist" if she remarried, as if she had died. This Act was repealed by the Hindu Widows Remarriage (Repeal), 1983.

The Hindu Women's Right to Property Act, 1937 provided some limited inheritance rights to the

Hindu Widow. But under the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, once a widow has succeeded to the property, she gains an absolute right on it and remarriage does not divest of her rights.

In India there is no restriction in remarriage of the Christian and the Muslim widows but certain sections of Christians frown upon widow remarriage. Widow remarriage is prevalent in tribal areas and in some of the lower castes. But the Hindu widows of the higher castes are not encouraged to remarry. However, in many parts of Panjab, Himachal Pradesh, Gujrat, and Haryana in agricultural families some kind of remarriage is found which provides security to the widow and the property remains within the family. In Panjab this ceremony is called "*Chadar Dalna*" in which an unmarried brother-in-law is married to the widow. In the absence of an unmarried brother-in-law, she is taken under the care of any surviving brother-in-law with whom she has a live in relationship. Similar ceremony called "*Karewa*" is held in Haryana that involves a surviving brother-in-law appointed by the family offers glass bangles and a few other items that restore the marital status of the widow. Similarly *Naata* or *Naatru* provides protection and security to the widows while maintaining the property within the family.

The Namboodri widows in Kerala and the Brahmin widows in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal undergo many hardships on the death of their husbands and a strict code of conduct ensured that they live a life of constant deprivation, neglect and dependency.

### Rise in the Number of Widows

According to the 2001 Census report there are about 45 million widows in India and 6.9% of women in India are widows and this number is steadily growing due to a number of factors given below.

### Difference in Age at Marriage

In Indian marriages, it is a normal practice to find a bridegroom who is older in age to the bride. So the women usually outlive their husbands.

## Religious Widows

The pilgrimage cities of India like Vrindavan and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh have a huge population of abandoned Bengali widows who were child brides married to much older men to remain within the caste. At the death of such men the child-widows were unwanted in their families and were sent off to these holy cities where they lived like beggars facing all kinds of harassment and indignities till their death. But now many widows from West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are coming to the holy cities of Vrindavan and Varanasi and to other places of pilgrimage like Allahabad, Haridwar and Tirupati etc to spend the remaining part of their lives on their own and to escape the indignities heaped upon them by their families and the society. Various studies and researches in these cities have indicated that the highest number of widows in these cities come from West Bengal. In Vrindavan itself there are estimated to be about 4,000 Bengali widows.

Most of these widows do not have any regular source of income. Hence they make a living by singing in the Bhajanashrams or by doing menial jobs in ashrams and temples. Quite a few of them live on the streets and beg outside the temples and river-ghats. There are a few rehabilitation homes being run by the Government and NGOs like the Guild of Service, Delhi, set up by Dr Mohini Giri provide shelter, food, clothes, healthcare and most of all dignity to such widows who have nowhere to go. These widows are also helped by the Guild of Service to procure their pensions. The Guild of Service also helps them in opening bank accounts and getting ration cards so that they have a sense of independence and empowerment through the various skills imparted to them. A comparative survey conducted by the Guild of Service to study the condition of widows in Vrindavan and Varanasi found that such widows who lived in such rehabilitation homes were very well looked after and they were happy to find a home away from their abusive families.

## Widows of Communal Riots

India has witnessed some worse kinds of communal conflicts ever since its independence.

The large scale massacres of men of both sides during the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 ended in a huge number of widowed, separated and abandoned women left to fend for themselves. In a multi-religious and multi-cultural country like India communal riots keep breaking out intermittently leaving behind destitute widows and orphans.

The horrific anti-sikh riots after Indira Gandhi's assassination by two of her sikh guards in Delhi in 1984 in which 2700 men were killed ended in such a huge number of widows being left behind that an entire colony in the North-West of Delhi was created to rehabilitate them. Almost all these widows, some of them illiterate, from comfortable middle and upper-income families had to struggle really hard to bring up their orphaned children and to look after the elderly with the meagre financial support offered to some of them by the government. The Government has announced a relief package of Rs 715 crores in September 2009 after 25 years of struggle for justice has not yet been disbursed.

The Godhra carnage in Gujarat in 2002 was equally terrible as it appeared to be a part of a more sustained campaign of hate, prejudice and violence between Hindus and Muslims wherein about one thousand men were killed. Moreover, the TV images of the riots presented very disturbing images of the incident. In this case civil society organisations like Guild of Service immediately swung into action and a widows' rehabilitation home was set up to provide relief to the bereaved women.

## War Widows

Armed conflicts during the Indo-China war, 1962, and the Indo-Pakistan wars in 1965, 1971 and the Kargil war in 1999 have resulted in a large number of war widows all over India but mostly in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and the North East. But the situation is the worst in Jammu and Kashmir where the women have faced the worst kind of physical, social and psychological violence. Apart from the large number of widows in this region, there are also a sizable number of women whose husbands have gone missing and these women

are termed as 'half-widows'. Armed struggle in the North East has similar problems where women in large numbers have been widowed or their husbands are missing.

Although armed forces have provided various measures for proper rehabilitation of the war widows, many widows still find it difficult to access these measures. A study to assess the financial compensation to the Kargil widows of Rajasthan notes that though India has fought wars previously, the compensation package and its dispensation was unique in the Kargil war. Compensation paid out was to the tune of Rs. 25 to 30 lakhs (US\$ 50,000-70,000) and most of it within 15 days of the death. This included contributions from the Central Government, State Government, Group Insurance, Benevolent Funds and the National Defence Fund (NDF) and donations of several social groups and relief funds. Up to Rs.200,000 was also placed in a long term deposit by the NDF towards the education of children on which interest was paid monthly and the amount matured when the child attained the age of 18 for girls and 21 for boys. A son or brother of the deceased was also enrolled in the army. This package was no doubt sufficient to make the family financially independent and secure. But in reality the widows did not have an direct access to these packages as this money was mainly handled by the male members of either natal or the marital homes. The need for proper management of financial support, emotional support and resolution of family conflicts calls for a holistic strategy for rehabilitation of family.

War widows, who were overlooked by family members earlier, (in both parental and marital homes) after receiving financial assistance, have acquired a measure of importance and clout based on possession of material assets. With increasingly felt desire to manage funds, the 'dependency structure' on family members is likely to break down. However, our society needs to plan for a role for widows that includes a decisive say in the decision making process and government needs to ensure that the goals of compensation packages are met and benefits accrue to the one they are meant for.

The War Widows Association, set up by Dr. V. Mohini Giri, in 1971 after the Indo-Pakistan war, provides education and job training for the socially shunned widows of India and also accords emotional support and guidance to rehabilitate war widows in society. The association is engaged in advocacy for a permanent rehabilitation policy for the war widows at the national-level.

### Farmer Widows

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) there were at least 16,196 farmers' suicides in India in 2008, bringing the total since 1997 to 199,132. The share of the big five states or the 'suicide belt' in 2008 – Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh remained very high at 10,797 or 66.7 percent of the farmer suicides in the whole country.

The situation is the worst in Maharashtra which had about 4,453 suicides, almost a quarter of the all-India total of 17,060. In the beginning it was believed that most of the suicides were happening among the cotton growers, especially those from Vidarbha. A look at the figures given out by the State Crime Records Bureau, however, was sufficient to indicate that it was not just the cotton farmer but farmers as a professional category were suffering, irrespective of their holding size .

Vidarbha was in the media for a spate of farmer suicides in recent years ostensibly because of the falling Minimum Support Price for cotton. The problem is complex and root causes include lopsided policies of the World Trade Organisation and developed nations' subsidies to their cotton farmers which make Vidarbha's cotton uncompetitive in world markets. Consequently Vidarbha is plagued by high rates of school drop outs, penniless widows left in the wake of suicides, loan sharks and exploitation of the vulnerable groups.'

Recent reports have indicated that farmers are dying in Gujarat also but these deaths remain unreported or under-reported. Due to the failed cotton and jeera crops about 300 farmers have

been reported to have committed suicide. Kerala is another state where farmers have committed suicides for not being able to repay their loans.

A study by Punjab Agricultural University in the districts of Bhatinda and Sangrur indicates 2,890 suicides between 2000 and 2008. The figure for the entire state would obviously be much higher. According to interviews conducted between November 2008 and July 2009 with peasant women of affected families in 47 villages across 10 districts - Ferozepur, Muktsar, Bhatinda, Moga, Mansa, Sangrur, Patiala, Ludhiana, Barnala and Faridkot - 80 per cent of those who committed suicide were between 21 and 50 years of age. It is the adult women who have to bear the huge burden of managing the demands of fatherless families. The price they pay is immense and takes the form of depression and other health problems caused by the overwhelming psychological pressure of grinding poverty. Even the paltry widow's pension of Rs 250 (US\$1=Rs 46.6) per month given by the Punjab government does not reach many on time.

### **HIV / AIDS Widows**

According to UNAIDS there are more than 3 million people in India living with HIV and this figure is constantly growing. The six high prevalence states are Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Manipur and Nagaland. The social stigma and widespread discrimination towards the HIV widows and their children makes their lives miserable because of lack of employment, livelihood and educational opportunities. The rural, landless widows are exploited economically and physically forcing them to lead a wretched life full of shame and isolation.

Lately some states like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Orissa have offered some minimal financial support to the widows. Orissa has started a monthly pension of Rs 200 per month which can in no way support the bereaved families.

The Indian government announced that from April 1, 2004 it would provide free ART in these six high prevalence states and later, the government

added Delhi to the list, a low prevalence state, due to its 'high vulnerability' to tackle the fast spreading menace of this deadly disease.

### **Displaced Women and Refugees**

Armed conflict in the Jammu and Kashmir area resulted in the migration of the Kashmiri Pandits and the widows of such migrants became refugees in their own home land. Although the Government has taken measures to rehabilitate these migrants, yet much more is desired for their welfare and empowerment.

Widows of refugees who have fled from the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to take shelter in India form another category of women in distress who have neither proper shelter nor adequate means of livelihood. Living in the squalor of the cluster of slums in and around big cities they too live a life full of challenges.

### **Widows of Natural Calamities**

In the event of natural calamities like floods (Kosi river in Bihar), earthquakes (in Latur, Gujarat) cyclones in the coastal areas of Bengal, Tsunami in the Southern coast one finds more men survivors than women. Because women cannot swim, climb trees or high perches like men. During such natural calamities usually women and children are evicted first but in when relief work begins, surviving widows have a hard time to jostling for food packets, and other relief measures.

### **Widows of Man Made Tragedies**

The Bhopal Gas tragedy of 1984, a number of deaths due to spurious liquor or hooch tragedies, terrorist attacks and the series of bomb blasts across the country has also seen a steep rise in the number of surviving widows.

### **Accidents**

Many women are widowed as their husbands are killed in accidents in factories, at the

workplace or while travelling, especially in the spate of serious train accidents that has taken place in the country in the last decade. Although some compensation is granted by the Government, an uneducated widow cannot access it and is dependant on some male member in the family who controls the amount after it is received. Till then she has to live on charity/mercy of the person/family on which she is dependant.

### Government Interventions

(A list of the welfare schemes and the legislation in favour of women would be listed here)

### Conclusion

The Civil Society and the Media are the main stakeholders who can engage in advocacy for the widows to the government and the international agencies.

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# Country Paper Presentation by: Stefania Nardin

## ITALY

### Italian's Widows

In Italy, according to the latest ISTAT figures, there are approximately 5 million people widows: 3,816,032 women and 694,577 men. Five widows for every widower. This means that an increasing number of women - widowed or separated – is dealing with insecurity in family relationships, work and social life.

There are more widows than widowers especially because of the average life expectancy of women (84 years old) is higher than men (79 years old) and also because of the different age at marriage.

Consequently the single parent household are 83 percent headed by women, also because after a separation or divorce, children are usually entrusted to the mother.

Widowers as well as separated or divorced women have to live with their children, this means that single mothers are the most representative group of the whole phenomenon is that women's poverty. They represent a particular group involved in the three systems of integration or social exclusion: family, labor market and welfare system. The visibility of the subject "single mother" is socially constructed through its recognition or non-recognition within the social and family policies. Despite that the overall impression is that the growing importance of the problem has not been reflected in the definition of appropriate policies for single mothers.

In the global context of European social policy, single mothers are still an invisible subject for several reasons. First, there are few support policies targeted specifically at lone parents: single parents become visible in larger groups, such as "mothers", "parents", "poor." Secondly, obtaining the benefits is often hidden behind the rights of children, although the protection

of children living with single mothers is in fact dependent on the legal and social status of their mothers. Thirdly, these benefits are often granted for a limited time and subject to very strict conditions.

Finally, that economic support for single parents is given on the basis of proof (means-tested), i.e. benefits reserved for the poorest, which means that single mothers are treated as simple categories "in a state of need."

These elements highlight how institutional protection systems is not linked to the changes that have profoundly altered the role of women in the family and the labor market.

Particularly the condition of widows involves different plights. There are problems in redefining their identity and their role within family, problems in raising children, problems with the husband's family and with the friends network.

But the economic issue is among the most pressing problems that makes widow's life unstable.

Everything changes with the partner's death. Facing life alone, widows have to decide about their destinies or even to make decisions regarding their own children without sharing them with anyone else. In a country where your sex and your role in the family indicate your value in society, to be a widow means you are half. Widows often fight against economic problems because they lost their male daily income.

Unfortunately most of widows don't have education: 80.9% have a primary or no qualifications, 5.9%, have a high school qualification degree and only 1.5% the degree.



Many researches revealed that marginalization of widows is exacerbated by low work occupations and by the difficult relationship between people and institutions: excessive administration, complicated rules, inefficiencies.

The retirement fund is the form of remuneration provided by state security institutions or even by para-state social security institutions, professional associations and private banks. In other countries, where the welfare state does not provide this kind of assistance is often provided by private companies on voluntary contributions.

Unfortunately the retirement fund often is not adequate for the family balance and when a husband died in young age, is almost never enough to guarantee the family survive, because the worker had not reached retirement age.

Other Italian widows remain by their own in elder age. Most of time they have to live alone because they don't have children or because their children are out of the house with a new family.

Finally, the population of widows is aging itself and progressively tend to coincide with the elder population; now only a 5 % of widows have less than 50 years, where in 1951 the ratio was 15%. It follows that widows has to fight also against health and disability problems due to the age.

When one of these widows is no more self sufficient, generally, she is move in a rest house. To stay in the rest house is necessary to pay a very high charge, but often this is the best solution because their sons and daughters don't have time and in the rest house there are nurses all day and night long. Anyway in 2001 the most part of widows were living in family and not in rest house, this was the situation :

	Male	Female	Total
In rest house	12.951	76.289	89.240
In family	687.121	3.727.125	4.414.246
Total	700.072	3.803.414	4.503.486

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# Country Paper Presentation by: Durga Neupane

## President of Western Development Regional Network of Single Women NEPAL

Good Afternoon to the Respected Chair, international guests for this conference, national participants, moderators, country paper presenters, media personnel and everyone present in this hall. I am Durga Neupane, President of Western Regional Network of WHR. Today I am very delighted to present a country paper based on the situation of widows here in the country. This paper is the reflection of the status of widows from different villages, districts and five development region of the country.

Women have always been comprised half of the population in the world but they have been always denied of their rights. Inequalities against women have existed in Nepal throughout history. Social malpractices such as child marriages, polygamy and stoning to death of women accused of witchcraft were practices that have existed in Nepal in the past.

In our society, patriarchy exists as an institutionalized system of male dominance and the manifestations of it have been expressed in various ways. It is tied to the ownership of property, access to political power and gets social status.

Thus, women in general and Hindu women in particular have not been able to enjoy equal social, cultural ,religious and economic rights throughout.

The situation of woman after the death of her husband is further severe. In Nepalese society, widowhood is not seen as natural stage of life cycle but as curse. The illness, natural death, accident, epidemics have been the major cause of death. However the decade long conflict in Nepal also led to increasing numbers of young widows and orphans.

The death of the husband marks the painful transition from wife to a single woman in a state where she is physically alive but socially dead. Right after the death, the bangles are

broken, all the jewelleries are snatched, she is forced to dress only in white dresses, her mobility is restricted, she is not allowed to wear colorful dresses, she is forced to intake only once in a day without any salt or spices, she is considered as inauspicious to participate in ceremonies and she has to follow set rituals for the rest of her life. These malpractices still prevail in grassroots level.

The lack of education, support from family and community, and country make them vulnerable also in terms of economic and legal rights.

WHR is pioneer organization in Nepal working for the socio-economic, cultural and political rights of widows. WHR has established regional network and offices. Till date there are widows groups in 68 districts of the country. There are more than 50,000 single women members organized in single women groups from those districts.

Representing all the development regions of the country, I am here to give the information on socio- economic conditions of single women.

There are 15,935; 10,341; 4,236; 6,609 and 4,409 single women organized in Eastern, Central, Western, Mid Western and Far Western Development region respectively till 2008 A.D. With the growing number of single women groups we have more than 50,000 single women members in the single women groups. We don't know how many widows there will be in remaining villages as we are not able to reach out. We are very unique in the sense that we have organized widows from every background and categories, class and castes. We never discriminate on the basis of their husband's background. The different issues within these ethnicities are similar to some extent and it also varies. We have many cases of young widows who are raped, exploited, physically abused and bear the trauma. They are always worried about the education and livelihood for their children.

## We never give up!!

We have now engaged most of the widows engaged in traditional and non traditional livelihood practices. Most of the widows are engaged in agriculture and informal economic activities such as menial jobs. Only few single women are engaged in service and business.

No we are able to get the land from the government and engaged more widows in the agro farming.

These days due to widows movement led from grassroots level, widows are becoming aware of their rights and conscious of their low status in society. Now we are already incorporated the issues of grassroots widows in local government agenda.

We are organizing and acting collectively in their best interests, both individually in their community and on the national level. The red color movement has been successful with these years of struggle. At the same time social attitude and the negative mindset towards widows has improved a lot. The strength of single women group has supported to amend discriminatory laws and policies regarding issues of single women.

The political transformation in Nepal in 2006 brought both qualitative and quantitative changes to address the multiple issues of women regarding 33% of reservation quotas. Despite of the 51 widows in the Constituent Assembly the issue of widowhood is still sidelined.

Single women of Nepal are sensitized as never before relating to their political status, inheritance of property and land ownership and other entitlements. However more work needs to be done in the arena of single women to reduce ignorance, prejudice and marginalization.

Finally, where there are many problems and challenges we should see the solution too.

In order to create the just and dignified life for single women, the proper mechanisms must be adopted from grassroots to the national level. The issues of single women must be addressed in the national agenda with high priority by the government. The national and international community should work together to formulate and implement national and international human rights instruments in their country context for the fortification of human rights of single women. This issue must be mainstreamed in the national development.

With all these initiatives, we can create a just society where single women and their children live their life as human beings full of dignity, respect and human rights.

I reflecting the thousands of voiceless and marginalized grassroots widows of my country urge all of you to raise this voice to the concerned authority and level.

Thank You

**Durga Neupane** is from Kaski district of Nepal, and is the President of Western Development Regional Network of Single Women.

# Country Paper Presentation by: Dr. Masuma Hasan

## Board Member of AURAT Foundation and Member of SANWED PAKISTAN

### Condition of Widows in Pakistan

Being a widow is not a stigma in Pakistan either in religion or under the law. Marriage in Islam, which is the religion followed by the majority of the population, is not considered as sacrosanct. It is viewed as a civil contract between two individuals which can be dissolved. Thus the extreme sanctity attached to marriage in certain other religions does not operate to turn a widow into an outcast or be held responsible for her husband's death. Traditionally, widows have been encouraged to re-marry and marriage to a widow has always been considered as an honourable act.

According to the latest Census (1998), in a population of 132.4 million, there were 2.7 million widows in the female population of 69 million. The largest number, 442,179, were found in the age bracket 75 years and above, followed by 416,773 in ages 60 to 64 years, and 326,176 between 50 to 54 years. However, Pakistan's population in 2010 is estimated at over 170 million so the number of widows has also increased.

#### Supportive Influences

The law of the land, as embodied in the Constitution of 1973, and all previous constitutions, does not discriminate between the rights of women and men. The Constitution guarantees equal rights to both and rules out discrimination on the basis of sex. It empowers the State to make special laws for the protection of women and children and take steps to ensure the full participation of women in all spheres of national life and protect the marriage, the family, the mother and the child.

A widow inherits one-fourth of her husband's property if she has no children, and one-eighth of his property if she has children. The Government has made humane provisions for the widows of

its employees. After the death of a Government employee, his widow receives the family pension until her own death. Widows of lower paid employees also receive a one-time grant for rehabilitation from the official Benevolent Fund. In the private sector, which works for profit, there are no universal rules governing support for widows of deceased employees, but given the culture of philanthropy, some short-term provision is probably made.

Since 1980, an officially administered zakat system has been operating in Pakistan. Zakat is a tax levied on Muslims at the rate of 2.5 per cent on 11 categories of assets. These funds are used for the benefit of widows, orphans and other needy persons and for those rendered homeless by natural calamities. They are collected by the State and their disbursement has been made the responsibility of the provinces through the provincial zakat committees. These committees operate down to the community level and disburse *guzara* (sustenance) allowance of which widows are also beneficiaries. Pakistan Baitul Mal (State Treasury), established in 1992, provides financial assistance to widows, orphans, destitute and sick persons, and for welfare projects including education, health care and self-employment schemes. The Government has issued special saving certificates for widows, pensioners and senior citizens. It has also set up the First Women Bank to encourage women to save and invest and Khushali Bank which operates micro-credit schemes, and many of whose clients are women.

Pakistan has one of the highest levels of private social investment (philanthropy) in the world. It has been estimated that 100-120 billion rupees are donated privately every year for welfare, which amounts to 2 per cent of Pakistan's GDP. This sum is remarkable because Pakistan is a

poor country. The volunteering rate in Pakistan is twice that of the global average. Traditionally, supporting widows and orphans, who are the beneficiaries of philanthropy, has been viewed as acts of piety.

There are great regional and class disparities in the status of women in Pakistan and, therefore, also in the condition of widows. In the last two to three decades, women have made a remarkable appearance on the economic and political scene. One indication of self-reliance among them, including widows, is the growing number of women-headed households. In the urban areas, women-headed households have multiplied because of the expanding informal sector in which the majority of women work and contribute.

Urbanisation and the spread of female education have given more space and opportunities to single women, including widows, to survive and find livelihoods. Urbanisation has broken down many barriers. According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2009-10, Pakistan is the most urbanised country in South Asia, with an urban population of 36 per cent. However, based on other development indicators, experts place this figure at well over 40 per cent.

The overall female literacy rate (10 years and above) in the 1998 Census was 32 per cent and is estimated officially at 45 per cent at present. There are large differences in female literacy between the urban and rural areas. In a mega city like Karachi (now estimated at 16 million) there is not much difference between female and male (both above 70 per cent) literacy rates between the ages of 15 and 24. On the other hand, there are immense regional disparities in female literacy and access to education opportunities. However, female enrolment at all levels of education is one of the fastest growing development indicators.

### **Negative Factors**

In spite of the positive elements in the legal and constitutional parameters described above, widowhood is a condition of extreme distress

for women in Pakistan. To use a local metaphor, when a woman becomes a widow, she feels as if the protective chadar from her head has been removed and the status of dependence has been thrust upon her. Most of the problems of survival which widows face are linked to poverty and two-thirds of the poor live in the rural areas. Poor women, who do not possess land and productive assets, live out the rest of their lives on the fringes of existence. Those who do possess assets can be exploited by the strong male culture, especially in the rural areas. They are also the victims of social and cultural prejudice and abuse.

Successive governments have not addressed the problems of widows specifically and no special policy initiatives have been taken to ameliorate their condition. The concern for widows falls within the context of concerns about women in general. Legislation discriminatory to women, introduced in the 1980s, had strengthened the hands of conservative forces and eroded the atmosphere of tolerance. Women's and citizens' rights activists, as well as professional organisations, have campaigned forcefully for the repeal of these laws.

The ability of widows to survive independently and seek livelihoods depends on the level of social and economic development in the region where they live, although there are always some trail blazers. Education brings confidence, but perhaps the most important element is the availability of safe and affordable transport to facilitate the widow's journey out of the protection of her home.

Single women, including widows, take charge of their families and dependents because of male migration, divorce, desertion, and the deaths of husbands caused by war, calamities and natural causes. Those who do not own land and productive assets may not have access to credit facilities or possess the skills to earn their own livelihood. Many community based organisations have long realised that women need very small amounts as loans, not tied to collateral, in order to start survival enterprises. Scores of such organisations

throughout Pakistan now provide these small amounts. Poverty still prevents the poorest of the poor from accessing the facilities available in formal institutions like First Women Bank and Khushali Bank.

Women, including widows, do not get fair remuneration as wages either, although women's rights organisations have lobbied for the reflection of their work in the formal workforce. In the rural areas, they spend long hours in crop and livestock production and in post harvest activities. However, their control over access to land, agricultural inputs, technology and support services such as credit, extension, training and markets is limited. In the urban areas, due to lack of mobility and access to markets, they are paid far less than counterpart male workers.

Although assessments of the scale of philanthropy in Pakistan have taken everyone by surprise, disbursement and use of the large sums generated is random and uncoordinated. Most philanthropy takes the form of private transfers between individuals. With some initiative, utilisation of part of the huge amounts donated annually can be accorded priorities and channelised formally into specific programmes for the uplift of widows.

### Natural Calamities

No single event threw up the problems of widowhood in Pakistan quite as dramatically as the earthquake of 8 October 2005. The earthquake measured 7.6 on the Richter scale and caused catastrophic damage. Official estimates placed the number of dead at 79,000 but unofficial mortality figures were as high as 300,000. Most of the casualties were women and children. Half a million children are said to have been orphaned and thousands disabled. It was estimated by the media that 66,000 women became widows and four million people became shelterless. Some women lost not only their husbands but also their children, land, homes and livelihoods. Perhaps the greatest upheaval caused by natural calamities is the breakdown of established social support

systems and relationships. Widows who are absorbed by extended families are generally protected but those living alone face new and unknown challenges. Security becomes the major problem in their lives.

### Internally Displaced Persons and The Battle Against Extremism

Pakistan has been at the centre of the battle against extremism and violence which has led to death and injury to thousands of its citizens. Women have become widows because of the violence perpetrated by extremists in suicide attacks and other forms of militancy. In Swat Valley, Army action against extremists was preceded by the evacuation of the whole population and the internally displaced persons (IDPs) were housed, where possible, in makeshift tent villages. Women, especially widows, and children who could not fend for themselves, suffered the most as it was difficult for them to move around for food, daily necessities and health care. The IDPs of Swat Valley eventually returned to their homes but this pattern of suffering will follow wherever military action is taken against terrorists.

### Supportive Legal Measures

The growing number of women in parliament, including the Speaker of the National Assembly, has been a great morale booster for women in Pakistan. Women occupy about 25 per cent (or more) of the seats in both houses of parliament, either through reservation of seats or direct elections.

Over the last few years, the Government has enacted affirmative legislation to promote gender equality and provide protection to women from which widows also benefit.

- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2004 against honour killings, which also target widows, was the result of a long struggle by women activists and women parliamentarians. It equates honour killing with murder and institutes penal punishments but has been criticized by



women's groups because it provides for exemptions, waivers and compounding.

- Protection of Women (Criminal Law Amendment) Act 2006 was promulgated to amend the Hudood ordinances and thereby provide some relief to women from their arbitrary and unjust provisions. Relief has been given to victims of rape and other offences but many discriminatory aspects have been retained.
- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2009 has criminalized sexual harassment and provides protection to women against different forms of harassment including written, verbal and physical harassment, obscene gestures and intrusion of privacy. The law makes all these acts of harassment in public and private spaces punishable by various terms of imprisonment and fines.
- The Protection Against Harassment at the Work Place Act 2010, provides protection to women from harassment at their places of employment. It includes a wide definition of employees on regular or contractual, daily, weekly, monthly or hourly basis, including interns and apprentices and will protect women in sectors such as brick kilns, agriculture, industry, markets and homes.

Also, it gives a broad definition of employers in the public and private sectors and clear definitions of harassment and the workplace. It lists major and minor penalties.

The bill on acid throwing against women, the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill 2009, was tabled by four women legislators from different political parties. It is waiting to become law.

### Livelihood Support

A recent major initiative by the Government was launching the Benazir Income Support Programme which aims at reducing poverty and empowering women by making them financially self-sufficient. In 2009-10, it provided Rupees 70 billion or Rupees 1000/- per month to 5 million families, including widows, to meet basic necessities or invest in setting up basic businesses. This programme is now multi-dimensional and provides assistance for health insurance and vocational training. It also targets those affected by natural calamities, internally displaced persons, war-affected families in conflict areas and victims of bomb blasts and suicide attacks. Widows are beneficiaries of all aspects of this scheme.

**Dr Masuma Hasan** is Chairperson of the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, Treasurer and Member Board of Governors of Aurat Foundation, the leading women's empowerment NGO in Pakistan, Member Board of Governors of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Member of the Board of the Pakistan Reinsurance Company Limited and Member of the Board of the Privatization Commission of Pakistan.

In her career in the public service in Pakistan, she retired as Cabinet Secretary to the Government of Pakistan, the highest post in the civil service. She served as Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office in Vienna, the International Atomic Energy Agency, UNIDO, and other international organizations in Vienna. She was Pakistan's ambassador to Austria and also held the posts of Director of the National Institute of Public Administration Karachi and Director General of the Management Services Division.

Dr Masuma Hasan did her Master's from the University of Karachi and earned her Ph.D degree in Politics from the University of Cambridge UK. She has represented Pakistan widely in conferences and seminars.

# Country Paper Presentation by: Maj. Gen. Dr. Dudley Perera Chairman of Ranavru Family Counseling and Support Service (RFCSS) SRI LANKA

## War Widows (Introduction)

- Over 80% are village girls
- Most are from low socio-income category
- Age distribution - between 18 – 38 years
- Married life - majority love affair (against Parents wishes) & few proposal marriages
- Majority not liked by their in laws
- Very short Married life, 30% No children, others Pregnant, with one or two children
- Majority are housewives, unemployed

## Difficulties Encountered

- Changing herself to be the chief occupant
- Taking over the responsibilities of the family
- Controlling Finances (Monthly Salary)
- Schooling of children
- Feeding the family & their dependence
- Finding accommodation to your kids & dependence
- Facing new challenges in life

## Government Supportive Role

- Funeral expenses
- Military Funeral
- Initial grant of Rs 100,000/- to Next of Skin (wife), if no children 50% goes to diseased parents
- Diseased Soldiers salary to his widow until he reaches 55 years (retirement age)
- Pension
- W & OP
- Providing houses to needy
- Scholarships to children

## Challenges Faced

- Children's education (finding a School)
- Studying & understanding self employment projects

- Improving your finances
- Living an independent religious life
- Suppressing your biological needs
- Considering re-marring (lose your benefits)

## RFCSS (Ranaviru Family Counselling & Support Service) Activities

- Counselling
- Support Service
- Children's Scholarships
- Self Employment Projects
- Educational programs to Children
- Workshops
- Social gatherings, Outings, Visits to Religious places, war memorial sites, etc.

### Counselling

- Selected War Widows trained as counsellors'
- Selection based on educational qualifications (teachers etc). At least one each from district/province trained
- Training conducted by Psychiatrists & Psychologists. Period of training three months



## Support Service

- Financial Management
- Attending to their Pay & allowances,
- Children's Schooling, admission
- Training in self employment projects



## Self Employment Projects

- Beauty Culture & flower décor
- Training in Dressing of bride & bride maids
- Horticulture
- Mushroom cultivation
- Singer sewing course
- Yogurt production course
- Mosquito net sewing course



### Bridal Dressing, Sewing Garments, Sewing Mosquito nets



## Children's Scholarships

- Financial grant till they reach University



## Workshops

- Annually three workshops during school holidays
- District level 2009 Kurunegala, Anuradhapura & Colombo & 2010 in Kandy
- Sort-out their problems, pay & allowances, pension, W & OP
- Develop friendship, exchange views ideas, visit their homes

## RFCSS Achievements

- 25% of war widows trained in different projects have achieved their objective (financially sound)
- They are now capable of living independently after overcoming the initial difficult period
- Now capable of managing their finances with the available resources
- War widows have recovered from depressive state, are now mentally stable and strong.
- Their children have come up hard way and have performed well in their studies

## Children's Beauty & Arts Competitions



**Maj. Gen. Dr. Dudley Perera** is a consultant obstetrician and gynecologist at Military Hospital, Colombo, Sri Lanka. He currently serves as the Chairman for Ranaviru Family Counseling and Support Service. He received his Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (MBBS) in Sri Lanka, AMS in the United States of America, D. Obs RCP in Ireland, MACOG in the United States of America, and his FCMA in Sri Lanka. He has served as the medical adviser to the commander of the Sri Lanka army as the Director General of the Army Medical Services.



# Country Paper Presentation by: Suzanne Solley

## From Glasgow University SCOTLAND

### Widows in Scotland

I am here to express the situation of widows in Scotland and the UK. I am lucky to come from a country where I am not anxious about the situation which would prevail if my husband were to pass away nor the treatment I would receive if I was to choose not to marry at all. This is due to the cultural acceptance of widowhood and single women and the services and facilities provided by the Government. This of course cannot stop making widowhood a time of sadness and grief but not a time of fear, anxiety and exclusion.

In Scotland and the UK single women and widows are free to pursue careers and activities which allow them to fulfill their potential rather than prohibiting it. Widows are seldom discriminated especially although women in general are often discriminated in the workplace and society at large. A widow is freely allowed to pursue education and a career of her choice however her commitments at home may prohibit this. She is not excluded and harassed for her loss but in fact is shown sympathy and compassion. If she chooses to remarry after some time she does so with societies support and encouragement.

Widows bereavement allowance and child benefits in the UK support widows after her husband has passed. National insurance which is paid for from employment contributes to the pension she receives. However the amount of pension received depends upon his contribution to national insurance in his lifetime. Child benefits payments although

not a huge sum supports widows financially through her difficulties. Services are provided by the Government such as child day care, free health care and counseling for her emotional bereavement.

There are many single women and mothers in UK, as I have suggested survival and adaptation after her husband's death is considerably easier for a widow in the UK. However it should be said that not every case of widowhood is positive and bringing up a family being a single parent is a challenge in every country whatever the situation.

However it may seem like I am painting a perfect picture of gender equality and empowerment of women in the UK, it must be said this is not entirely the case. Women are vastly outnumbered by men in decision making areas like parliament, only one in five who sit in parliament are women. Women are often denied the top jobs in companies, not due to lack of experience or qualification merely due to their gender. On average a women gets paid 27% less for exactly the same job. In a country where men and women are supposed to have equal rights, this is alarming. This gender pay gap has existed for years and shows no signs of going away, in fact gender inequality in terms of pay is increasing the UK is ranked 81st out of 130 for gender equality in terms of pay. Some say total gender equality is decades away in fact 200 years away. Although new policies are being introduced to make large companies publish what men earn compared to women.

***Suzanne Solley** is an undergraduate geography student at Glasgow University in Scotland. She is interested in women's issues particularly in widows' issue and is currently doing research on widowhood.*

# Country Paper Presentation by: Beth Fairleigh

Member of Crisis Recovery International USA

## Status of Widowhood in the United States - Written by Morgan St. Clair

Widows all across the world face the same struggle, living without their husband in a male dominated world. Resources are taken away from a woman when she loses her husband and this capital that a woman once had is measured differently across societies. Social constructions within cultures all impact widows on contrasting complex scales. The variations of the discriminatory behavior are very different from the western more developed world to the traditional lives women endure in much of Asia and Africa. The United States and other western countries still have injustice instilled in their societies through stereotypes and attitudes placed upon widowed women, economic hardships and the overall culture portraying widowed women differently than those with their husbands in their lives.

In order to understand how widows are portrayed currently in the 21st century and how other countries with severe discriminatory practices can learn, we must examine the history of widows in the United States. Rights of widows emerged through different organizations, unions and social clubs before the government actually changed laws politically and introduced national social security schemes. As early as 1775, there was a meeting of the Society for Constitutional Information which was formed to discuss social issues started a relief fund for widows, orphans and aged parents who were suffering from England's immigration laws from the king. One of the first women's organizations in 1833, the Boston Seaman's Aid Society assisted widows and orphans of sailors and then not much longer later, the American Widows Association was formed. It wasn't until the early 1900's that the government added amendments to federal funding. Elderly widows were able to receive social security along with her children, dependent on the husband being a covered worker. The changes however did not

include African Americans. They did not receive the same benefits as covered Americans due to their lower status in society at the time. As other social security benefits came into existence over time, widows reforms occurred as well. Through the world wars including those the U.S is fighting currently and the largest terrorist act to hit the U.S on September 11, 2001 government officials quickly took notice of the tremendous needs affecting hundreds of thousands of women. Presently, there are many widows organizations such as the American Widow Project which focuses on military widows and how to recover psychologically and economically.

Considering the high numbers of women affected by conflict, psychological needs are realized much more in the western countries than in parts of Africa and Asia. In spite of the billion dollar mental health profession in the United States where anti-depressants are the number one prescribed drug there is still an ongoing problem with women, specifically with how widowhood is looked down upon. Due to the large population consisting of many ethnic and class groups, American widows endure the life of widowhood differently. Upper class widows are economically sound and often are seen as more attractive to a man, perhaps of her vulnerability. Lower class widows often take advantage of outreach community programs due to their lack of resources. According to the 1999 US Census, women are four times more likely to be widowed than a man. That year the census brought out a shocking conclusion, that 37.9 percent of African Americans never remarry, further proving that white women widows feel more inclined to remarry due to the financial stability.

American social roles were defined as a "two sphere ideology" which followed the social systems which were evolved over time. As



women became more independent, educated and financially stable, losing their husband was not as traumatic as it once was. Although women have come a long way since the time of 1950's house makers role and the male breadwinners, there is still a gender divide that exists which puts women at a significant disadvantage. There is a double standard when losing a partner in the United States, where a man is often seen as very attracted to women and women whom are widowed are viewed as unfortunate that she is single at such an age.

In contrast to other cultures, American women have moved away from their extended families and lose the control that in-laws once had decades before. In many of the patriarchal systems that exist throughout much of Asia and Africa, a daughter moves away from her nuclear biological family and moves with her new in-laws family. Since this is not the case in the United States, the widow does not have the control from the husband's family when she loses her husband which is often constraining to the woman. Women

who have their own career can adapt easier when becoming widowed than those who do not have a stable income which is very often the case in the United States and in other cultures. Organizations such as AARP, for older adults, church groups and family members all help women in modern America endure the struggles of widowhood both emotionally and economically.

Still in the 21st century there are many internal struggles emotionally that widows face in modern America and many widows believe there should be more economic help from the government. The number of women will increase tragically as the U.S continues to occupy conflict zones not to mention the health problems that affect many more men as well. Traditionally, women were pitied and were not to remarry again, although with the feminist movement in the 1960's, the increase of college educated women and the disappearing once rigid role of the housewife, widows have emerged as strong single women in which many other cultures can learn from.

**Beth Fairleigh** is the member of Crisis Recovery International, a nonprofit agency dedicated to assisting survivors of traumatic events worldwide, by providing humanitarian assistance.

# Annex 9 Plenary Session Presentations

## Plenary Session Presentation by: Lily Thapa

Founder President, WHR, NEPAL

### A Journey towards Empowerment of Widows in Nepal

Women in Nepalese society find themselves in queer circumstances. On one hand women are revered and worshipped as Goddesses, on the other hand they are exploited as subordinates. A woman's life is only considered of value if she is 'the daughter of' 'sister of' and 'wife of' a male member of her family. The situation worsens when a woman becomes a widow in Nepal. She is unable to return to her maternal home, and she is no longer welcome in her marital home either. A widow is considered as having 'ill luck' and an obstacle in the way of her families in getting her share of the property. The practice of child marriage is still persistent in many parts of rural Nepal. Many young women have left her education to get married, then when she is widowed she neither has the required knowledge or skill to sustain a livelihood.

In Nepal's patriarchal society, there is widespread discrimination of women in all spheres. Women in Nepal are discriminated in various aspects of everyday life, right from cultural traditions to laws and policies. The moment a woman loses her life partner, she is denied to wear anything that is colorful which is considered an auspicious color. Jewellery which defines married women in the Nepali society are also taken away from her. She lacks the confidence to question the validity of restrictions, or propose alternatives and negotiate with the families. More than denying a widow of wearing auspicious colors, this denies them of their freedom and rights to social life. We are from the society where women

were burnt alive in the funeral pyre of their dead husband. The question always comes in our mind that why so many social practices and discriminatory customs are for women? Even though half the world's population is women and all have been brought into this world by a woman - it is still women who are subordinate. Women are first born as a daughter, then as a wife and mother, then immediately after the husband dies she is reborn as a widow, this time with fear for herself and her dependents.

It is usual that "death" is associated to the life of a widow, for when death occurs to a man who is someone's husband, widows have to bear the rest of their lives with more unhappiness and disgrace. There are cases like rape, harassment and discrimination which emerge from the shadows each day as we continue our movement. Recent cases include women whose husbands return from employment in foreign countries infected with HIV/AIDS, and passed away leaving their wives infected as well who are shunned from family and kept away from their children. The past conflict has added to the existent backdrop of patriarchy and reinforced the subordination of all women. Conflict has provided the excuse for women, especially those without male support, to be harassed, abused and even raped without repercussions. The situation for widows is even worse with pervasive marginalization from society. The decade long civil war has worsened the plight of widows.

The insurgency in the country has made women, and moreover, widows more vulnerable towards trafficking, sexual and physical abuse, HIV/ AIDS and mental harassment at home and in workplaces. There is also a pressing problem of child marriage in the rural areas, due to which more than 40% of women are married before the age of 20. Young widows are more vulnerable to sexual violence and discrimination. Most women are economically dependent on their husbands due to which it is a struggle to make ends meet when their husband dies. Around 67% of widows are between 20 to 35 years of age with 3 to 4 children in an average. This creates greater economic challenges for the widows when meeting basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. Due to lack of financial resources, there is a high rate of school dropout amongst children of widows, especially amongst daughters. Widows are often restricted to leave the house by their in-laws and face barriers to work. 29% of widows are illiterate, which makes them more prone to enter informal, exploitative occupations in massage centers and brothels. Veiled with a sense of loneliness and insecurity, most widows are emotionally scarred with the trauma, and face psychological problems. In addition to economic hurdles, there is immense societal stigma and cultural barriers that forbid widows from attending auspicious religious and ceremonial functions. Widows in Nepal are often blamed for their husbands' death and are considered as husband eater. There is no law to protect the fundamental rights of this vulnerable population of widows, who suffer from discriminative legal and government policies. Most widows are ignorant of any legal status or their rights to compensation or inheritance. They lack self-confidence and are immobilized in a life where they already face discrimination due to their status as women.

On connecting more widows, a single women's group was formed, which eventually led to the formation of Women for Human Rights, single women group (WHR). Women for

Human Rights, single women group (WHR), is an NGO established in 1994, to address the rights of widows and strengthen their lives by empowering them economically, socially and culturally. WHR envisages in creating a non-discriminatory and equitable society where widows live with freedom, respect and dignity. WHR has made large scale social impact at the grassroots level. Starting out in one room where widows convened, WHR has now formed 425 single women groups in 68 districts with a membership of over 50,000 members. Confidence and capacity building programs have also been implemented to enable widows to seek employment opportunities. Widows have been trained in income generation activities and it has trained and mobilized many social mobilizers, Para-legal volunteers and Para-counselors. Additionally, it has launched advocacy and awareness campaigns, especially in places where ignorance and traditional discriminatory practices against widows prevail. Tremendous social changes have been made at grass root level. After persistent efforts of the groups, the state was compelled to listen to their appeals, and streamlined the subject of widowhood on the government agenda. For the first time in Nepal the issue of widows was addressed in the 11th Amendment of the Civil Code as well as into the 11th plan of action of Nepal Government. After continuous advocacy and lobby with the government, WHR has been able to change some major discriminatory legal provision from country code such as:

- No male permission required for passport
- Property of deceased husband does not need to be returned after remarriage
- There is also no need to reach the age of 35 to inherit deceased husband's property
- Providing of the monthly allowance to widows regardless of their age
- Widows no longer require the consent of their adult sons and unmarried daughters to sell or hand over property

At regional level, WHR has been advocating for rights of widows in the South Asian region, where discrimination against widows is buttressed by the traditional cultural practices. After much persistence from SANWED the issue of widows was incorporated for the first time in the Colombo Declaration during the SAARC Summit in Sri Lanka.

However, there are many more milestones to overcome, and to surpass them, we need the support from stakeholders at the local, national, and international level that's why we are here today. Cultural and economic practices may differ, but widowhood is an emerging issue that is prevalent globally. Although we have made noted changes in sensitization and advocacy of issues of widows in Nepal, discrimination, violence and harassment still persists. Issues of widowhood are still sidelined, and the UN CSW,

CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action still have not incorporated the term "widows" in their agenda.

Our aim is to mainstream the issues of widowhood in the national and international agenda by mobilizing widows globally. We wanted to create a world where discrimination on the basis of marital status will be eliminated. One such issue for which we are gathered here today is widowhood. We will not rest until widows are given the equal and equitable treatment as all women, and until womanhood is no longer associated with suffering and burdens. We shall continue to defy the silence and stand out for their justice, and we hope that from today you shall too.

Thank you

**Lily Thapa**

*Lily Thapa is Founder of Women for Human Rights, single women group (WHR). Lily is teaching as a Lecturer in University of Nepal.*

# Plenary Session Presentation by: Margaret Owen

Director of WPD UK

## Mobilising the International Voice of Widows

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am honoured to be invited to address you at this important conference focusing on such an urgent but mainly neglected issue that impacts on all of our societies with such damaging consequences.

Even before the Beijing World Conference for Women, we had been working intensely to raise awareness among the international community, governments, donors, and other international NGOs about the status of widows; and the urgent need for action to address their needs and roles. Yet, in spite of nearly two decades of effort we still have a long way to go before widows everywhere can enjoy their full human rights, are protected from violence and can properly participate in society and be supported in their crucial roles as sole supporters of families, and key contributors to social and economic life.

WIDOWHOOD is not simply a “women’s issue”. The status of widows, how they are treated, has an irrevocable impact on their children and on the whole of society and its future.

But now, today, in the 21st Century, widowhood is the most neglected of all gender and human rights issues. Given the huge unprecedented explosion in the numbers of widows especially in countries affected by conflict, AIDS, and harmful traditional practices, the need for action has never been more urgent.

Before we discuss the obstacles that must be overcome to realise our goals, I want to share with you some of our successes in the last couple of years, as this should give us all

some encouragement, and it is your contributions to our work that has made these achievements possible.

First, the WPD Widows’ Charter - first launched by our hosts for this Conference, WHR-SWG, and so effectively used by them to influence government policy here in Nepal – is now becoming a useful lobbying tool for widows’ NGOs in many other countries.

The Charter was also warmly received by the CEDAW, along with our *Dossier on Widowhood: Issues of Discrimination for the Attention of CEDAW* at our Presentation to them this February, asking the Committee to consider making a General Recommendation to State Parties to address widowhood in their jurisdictions. The Dossier was developed in consultation with our partner widow groups, but needs continually to be updated. In Geneva, WPD received excellent advice from the Committee on how to use the more rapid processes available under the Convention, such as the Enquiry and the Optional Protocol. We are now working with partner NGOs in some selected countries to undertake this work.

Armed conflicts, ethnic cleansing, and the violence that continues in post-conflict scenarios has created a phenomenal number of widows, of all ages, including the very young, young mothers and the very old. Many of these women are also victims of sexual violence, have lost their homes, are internally displaced and have no access to protection, health care, or justice. Many of them are destined to spend long years in refugee camps with no hope of

being resettled, or reclaiming their homes, land and property. UN SCR 1325 and its supporting Resolutions require all actors involved in conflict resolution, prevention and reconstruction to analyse the impact of war on women and girls, and ensure that their voices are heard at the peace table. We, WPD, insist that widows' voices too must be heard, and the voices of the wives of the "disappeared" and "missing", and that every effort is made to gather the data on this category of women. Through WPD's membership of the UK GAPS (Gender Action on Peace and Security), widowhood will now be referenced both as a Global Indicator at the international level and in the UK National Action Plan on implementation of 1325. This is a positive step forward towards the recognition that addressing the status of widows, in the context of reconstruction, constitution redrafting and law reform, is essential if real peace, equality, justice and democracy are to be achieved. It is often said "No Women, No Peace". We say "No widows, No Peace".

As advocates, we require data, information, quantitative and qualitative on all aspects of widows' lives, in order to galvanise governments and the UN into action. Without this information, we can have no influence on them. Therefore the Mapping and Profiling project, so successfully undertaken here in Nepal by WHR-SWG should be adapted for use in other countries. WPD is currently exploring with donors how the WHR experience in Mapping can be shared with our partners in other countries.

WPD also very recently held talks with the Commonwealth Secretariat in London and they are now interested in collaborating with us in the future both in working on the Mapping and Profiling exercise in some selected countries, on the CEDAW enquiry process and on hosting a widowhood conference either in London or in a Commonwealth country. Copies of our Widows' Charter and the CEDAW Dossier were circulated

to all the Commonwealth Ministers for Women's Affairs which met in mid-June in Barbados.

Finally at the 54th Session of the UN CSW (Commission on the Status of Women) held in New York this March, where we were fortunate to have representatives from WHR Nepal, Guild of Service of India, the Democratic Republic of Congo and WiDO of Nigeria on our Panel, we agreed on Recommendations for action which were then discussed with the UN Deputy-Secretary General, Her Excellency Asha-Rose Migiyo. She advised us on what we should do next and asked to be kept fully in touch with our progress.

These Recommendations included requests to the UN Secretary-General to commission a special report on widowhood in conflict situations; appoint a UN Special Rapporteur on Widowhood; and designate a UN Widowhood Day. We need governments now to take these recommendations forward on our behalf

### **The Big Question: Why is Progress So Slow?**

First, because we are up against the rigid assumption by those in power with the purse strings that women are an "homogenous" whole, and that it is invidious to single out one category of women for special consideration "as it would be" (to quote our own UK FCO) "unfair on other categories".

Second, it is a widely held view that most widows are elderly, and as such are respected and looked after by their families, whereas the truth is that widows are of all ages and some are still mere children when widowed. Also, much of the violence suffered by widows is perpetrated by family members. Widows tend to be invisible and unheard. This is why we are all here – to make them visible and to ensure that they are all supported to band together, articulate a collective voice, be properly heard and counted, and able to participate in decision-making.



## Strategies

It is quite clear now that we – the widows' NGOs – have done enough talking to each other and preaching to the converted. We also know that in every country where widowhood is a problem of "social death", marginalisation, and poverty widows must be supported to have their own organisations. They cannot depend upon the major "women's NGOs" in their country to take on their complex and compelling issues, nor their Ministries for Women's Affairs to take notice of their situation unless they lobby them.

As the UN DSG also advised, it is now a

matter for Governments to take forward the Recommendations made by us at the UN this last March. You all have a copy of these. No amount of Resolutions, Petitions and Reports emanating from the NGO world will have any effect on the UN at its highest level. Only governments can make these interventions on our behalf.

Therefore it is up to all of us now, armed with the Charter, the Recommendations, the CEDAW Dossier, the Beijing +15 paper and the analysis of the MDGs in the context of widowhood, to lobby our own governments and regional authorities in a systematic way.

***Margaret Owen** is the Director of Widows for Peace through Democracy (WPD) and International Focal Person of SANWED, UK. She is also a consultant on Widowhood at UN DAW and frequently speaks at the international meetings such as UN CSW and OCHR.*

# Plenary Session Presentation by: Dr. Mohini Giri

## Chairperson of Guild of Service INDIA

### The Way Forward “Widows Voices Empowered”

South Asia is a diverse region with diverse languages, cultures, caste and creed. However, there is one thing common that goes through the length and breadth of the South Asia and that is patriarchy.

We had realized about two decades ago that it is most important to meet the challenges and problems faced by South Asian women who are discriminated socially, culturally and religiously. Although the Constitution in most countries guarantees equal rights, yet, even in this twentieth century, a widow's human rights are trampled; freedom of expression smashed and her physical security is at stake as she is tortured physically and mentally.

We at Guild thought it necessary to raise this vital issue at an international platform as it is a case of international concern and we wanted to use the sensitivity of the UN System to look at this section of deprived community. I am indeed very happy to be here at the International Conference which would indeed focus on vital gender bonding through networking in this region carry out research in this region emphasizing on the commonalities and diversities resulting from the socio-economic religions and cultural differences influencing government policies and find remedies and safeguards to protect widows from harmful traditional practices. I am happy to note that these past two decades with the great efforts of my friend Margaret and all of us, we have been able to bring awareness among the UN Systems and our own governments to bring the plight of widows as an International issue of concern. Now, from this meeting onwards, we must go with a resolve that UN bodies and our governments would have effective programs and policies for empowerment of this marginalized section. It's a sad comment that

even today widows are discriminated, isolated and abused. I would like to emphasize here that widowhood is not voluntarily embraced by any women but it is thrust upon her, either by circumstances beyond her control or as a result of conflict situations.

Once upon a time a woman who lost her husband was called a widow but society has traversed so far that today we have conflict widows, child widows, quasi widows, armed conflict widows; we have formed categories within these realms of misery. This conference must see through its members to convey a need for a **National Policy for Widows** to their respective countries so that women who have suffered due to conflict, insurgency and war do not remain the shadows of the country. The National Policy should ensure that allocation of funds should be made in the budget of each Ministry for the economic, social, legal and educational empowerment of widows.

We have to consider certain aspects to strategize our recommendations, we have to get together and **universalize** all our efforts in all South Asian Countries for acceptance of women in society. All of us together should initiate steps to eliminate bias against widows. Even now, in many countries the very shadow of a widow is unacceptable. She is restricted with dress code, food code and behavior code etc. What we all need to do today is to see an **effective convergence** of all services, resources and infrastructure in our planning to equip widows with necessary skills to meet their challenges and form Self Help Groups and find ways to overcome poverty.

Savita was 13 years old when she got married and by 17 she had two children and by 19, she was widowed. Today because of the Auxiliary

Nurses Training that she underwent, she is a dignified earning economic member of society, standing proud. Hence, these best practices could be used to help each other towards giving dignity to the widows.

Our International Partners have always used that flexibility, technical expertise and connections with the grassroots of their country to forge an effective platform to issues which are important and troubling the society. I am happy that we have come here together to formulate plans of action and present it to International body and South Asian Countries to respond to our various needs. Today, we have a need to work upon a **rights based** framework and use an empowerment strategy to promote gender justice and gender equality.

India held an International Conference on Capacity Building of Marginalized Widows way back in 2007 and served to un-wrap the different layers of marginalization that widows face and brought about an insight on their new issues. It was significant to have focused for the first time on that section of women whose voices were never heard.

South Asia has always been a region of contradictions as I have said before. To all this we have added another great dimension “demon in the shape of fundamentalism and terrorism”. This has given rise to genocide and an alarming increase in the number of widows. Widows who are created due to such conflict, women who are discouraged, families rendered to poverty, girls raped and abused, suffer all this because some politician somewhere has decided not to have dialogue but to have conflict, hence, men create circumstances where women suffer. 10 percent of the Indian female population is widowed. Afghanistan is no better, Kabul alone estimated 50,000 widows in armed conflict. I do not have statistics for other countries but it would be similar. Years after peace accords are signed; widows remain abandoned in refugee camps, are displaced and unable to return to the former homes, or are homeless, surviving as beggars, forced into prostitution at the hands of traffickers.

Today before we depart, we must dwell on this very important aspect of widowhood which is created due to war and widowhood and find ways in the world for **dialogue and conciliation** for a peaceful existence.

In the last conference, noted sociologist, Veena Majumdar had said this kind of operations by conflict grinds out our spirit and widows have been kept oppressed and suppressed by our society.

The majority of conflicts are taking place in traditional patriarchal societies where, even in peacetime, the status of widows is low. Oppressive traditional practices, ineligibility to inheritance, denial of ownership of land reduces them to paupers. However, in the post conflict environment, these injustices are vastly exacerbated. It is desperately important that widows’ **legal rights** are prioritized in new constitutions and laws.

The experience of women and men in situations of tensions, war and post-conflict reconstruction is significantly different. Approximately 80% of today’s civilian casualties are women and 80% of all refugees and internally displaced people worldwide are women and children.

The research has shown that the widows developed three sets of problems including emotional stress, sexual harassment and social undesirability. The second set of problems, are related to the mismanagement of home affairs, losing control over children and inferiority complex while the third set of problems are associated with loneliness, physical insecurity, over-burden of work and compulsion of remarriage.

Hence in the post conflict scenario there are large numbers of women who are triply traumatized -as women, as widows, as the poor and needy.

A study of conflict is a study of politics of gender, or the power relationship between men and women. There is a connection between masculinity and militarism; the traditional

notion of masculinity resonates with militarist ideas. The army is an institutional sphere for the cultivation of masculinity; war provides the social space for its validation.

A majority of women affected by conflict are widows. To the process of peace building they bring sensitivity tempered by their personal loss, a sense of immediacy since their families' future are at stake and surviving skills against all odds. These qualities once tapped while accelerating the ownership of process of reconstruction will help them individually to overcome their personal traumas.

To heal, reconciliation is the process through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future.

The peace-building process comprises several stages including conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict peace building and reconstruction. Sustainable peace requires the full participation of women at each of the stages of the peace process.

Traditional 'feminine' values of tolerance, listening and openness to dialogue and survival skills have to become accepted as values of society. Such a paradigm shift alone will pave the way for reconciliation and greater democratic spaces.

Women can affect positive change and widows as survivors and fighters can negotiate for greater democratic spaces.

Today we have to see that our conference puts women on the negotiating table for the full and

equal participation in conflict prevention, peace operations and post-conflict peace-building.

While we have already talked about widows and conflict widows, if I fail to mention the various laws which prevent women from equal rights like property rights, livelihood rights and the like, we will not be doing justice. When we go back from here, each country should in depth look into the various lacunas found in the laws of their country which bars women from a life of dignity.

Secondly, today our united voices should be raised at various platforms to improve the existing situation.

Thirdly, we will have to work out concrete strategies to collaborate with our international partners and put up a unified approach for all major international meets in future.

Fourthly, how do we effectively become agents of change and influence our government where policy change is needed and where we have to be on the negotiating table.

Fifthly, there is a need to chalk out a comprehensive health program for this marginalized group.

Finally, today's meeting should focus on future strategies, common action and how we can change the situation in South Asia.

**"When we were together,  
The world was with us.  
Now that I am alone  
Why has the world forsaken me?"**

*Dr. V. Mohini Giri has served as Chairperson of the Guild of Service since 1979. Dr. Giri has also served as Founder President of the War Widow Association since 1971 and as Founder Trustee of the Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia since 2000. A social activist and leader in the women's movement, specializing in human rights and gender justice, Dr. Giri is renowned both nationally and internationally for her committed work in empowering women politically, socially, legally and economically.*

# Annex 10 Thematic Group Work and Discussion

## Group 1: Role of widows in Conflict and Peace Building

Facilitated by: Felix Neuhaus and Nirmala Dhungana



- WIDOWS, especially in developing countries, are the very poorest and most vulnerable of women
- Suffer from significant discrimination and abuse due to oppressive interpretations of

religious customs and traditions across a range of regions and cultures

- The killing of male members of society has resulted in a huge increase in the number of widows

### The Situation of Widows Worldwide is Decreasing by

- Armed conflict
- Ethnic violence
- HIV/AIDS pandemic
- Harmful traditional practices
- Natural disasters

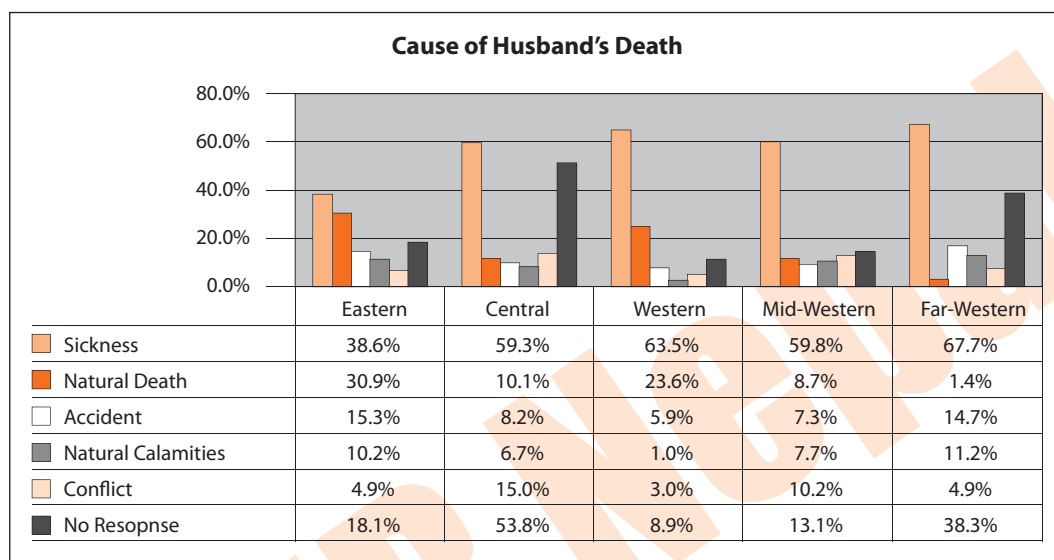
### Negative Impacts on Widows

- The current financial crisis and climate change deteriorating conditions of widows and their children
- Widows are vulnerable to human rights violations in situations of armed conflict
- Widows predominate amongst internally displaced people (IDP) and refugees, and are mostly not rehabilitated and re-integrated into society
- Widows face massive social, economic and upheaval problems in society due to conflict
- Wives of the missing are unable to rebuild their lives
- Extreme poverty exposes widows to economic and sexual exploitation, trafficking and diseases



## Data on IDP and Conflict affected Widows in Nepal

- 3,907 registered WHR members are widows as a result of the conflict
- More than 800 WHR registered conflict affected widows are internally displaced
- 67.9% of the registered are displaced to another community
- 35.7% are between 25-30 years, most live in a small room with 3-4 children
- 82.2% living in economic crisis



**Table 1: IDP figures collected from various sources and documents since 2003**

IDP figure	Source	Date	Comment/ limitation
35,000-50,000	OCHA	March 2008	Estimate of agencies working with IDPs
25,000	Government of Nepal	January 2005	Based only on compensation applications
50,000-70,000	OCHA	July 2007	Estimate of the IDP Protection Group
38,000	Government of Nepal	August 2006	Sourced to NHRC, 2006
212,985-272,600	Caritas	August 2006	Only covers IDPs living in district headquarters
At least 100,000	CHR	January 2006	Between 100,000 and a few hundred thousands
18,666	Ministry of Home Affairs	July 2005	Only includes those displaced by Maoists
17,583	SCA and CCWB	July 2005	No. of children migrating to India between July-Oct. 2004
More than 60,000	NMVA	August 2004	IDPs in Kathmandu displaced by Maoists
500,000	EC and RRN	April 2003	Includes forced migration to India
80,000	UNDP/RUPP	January 2003	Only covers 2001-2003. Extra migration to urban areas

Source: IDMC 2008



## Role of Widows in Conflict and Peace

- Widows are playing an important role in peace-building
- Widows -bridging the communities
- The unique role of widows play as custodians of the social fabric of communities
- Widows playing significant role – in mediation between two conflict parties
- Widows as sole supporter of family after the death of their husbands
- Widows in many countries – banding together and mobilizing for the peace building in communities



## International Examples

### In East Timor

- Widows /Women take an exemplary example of innovation in Transitional Justice Process

### In South Africa

- Widows of conflict gave testimonies/ statements of the crimes that happened to them or their families

### In Chechenia

- 1990 Russian mother's went to battlefield to take back home their soldiers sons

### In Sri Lanka

- Parents of both parties in general and particularly women come together whose sons and husbands are missing, detained and disappeared during the conflict
- Women mother / daughters coalition for peace

### In India

- Kashmiri Widows played agencies role in political patriarchy's azaadi (peace) struggle treasured the arms and military trained but never pointed the guns

### In Bangladesh

- Self dependents women's movement from 1984-1997

### In Nepal

- Widows take on leadership roles in villages and across civil society in grass-roots peace building, human rights and disarmament movements
- Women single-headed household's -risked their lives negotiating for survival with armed combatants



## Example-Actions of Widows and Their Groups

- Single Women Groups in Nepal and in India provided shelter for conflict affected women and children
- The widow groups are providing skill development trainings and facilitate job placement
- Empowerment of young widows who have been displaced by the conflict and were vulnerable to sexual exploitation
- Many widows crossed borders work in refugee camps to trace the missing and alleviate the physical and psychological effects of the violence
- Widows took on tasks that were formerly taboo for women such as ploughing in the fields

Aftermath of war in Nepal, wives of the missing husbands organised themselves and ensured that, for example, in the drafting of the new constitution, in law and administrative reforms, widows issues are mainstreamed and their rights are guaranteed



## Measures to be taken

- Absence of reliable data on the numbers and situations of widows and wives of the missing
  - Mapping and Profiling of widows systematically
  - Distribute, share and use the available data to lobby for the issue
- Huge increase in the number of widows and wives of the missing as a consequence of armed conflict
  - Special social security measures have to be adopted for wives of missing husbands
  - Immediate support mechanism to ensure security
  - Particular issues of widows and wives of the missing must be on the peace negotiations and accords agendas
  - Conduction of awareness campaigns about situation of widows during conflict to reduce active involvement of husbands in war activities
  - Governments must take responsibility to search and provide information about missing husbands



- Extreme vulnerability of widows and daughters of widows in the instability of societies in the aftermath of war and SCR 1325 has not assisted them to have their immediate as well as long-term needs addressed
  - The implementation of UNSCR 1325 must include role of widows in peace building process
  - Empower widow's economic activities as a means of rehabilitation, reintegration and reconciliation
  - Build the capacity of widows as peace activists and support widows groups as peace agencies

- Promote Gender Awareness
- Compensation & pension must be provided to address the most important needs
- After Peace Accords are signed widows of war continue to struggle to survive in refugee and IDP camps and are unable to return to their original homes
  - Widows must be effectively engaged / included in planning, implementing and monitoring conflict management and peace building process
  - Governments must take action and actively promote reintegration
  - NGOs should implement measures for reintegration and get support from international/multilateral organizations
  - Women in Lobbying positions (e. g. Constituent Assembly) should aware political leaders
  - Peaceful environment and political stability must be enabled
- Particular individual security issues for widows
  - Launch of capacity development measures for widows
  - Measures for sustainable economic empowerment of widows have to be implemented
  - Sensitization about widows/gender issues for men to make them aware about difficult situation of widows
  - Protection measures and mechanisms on local level should be established
  - Official Documents (passport, birth certificate, e.g.) must be provided by local bodies to enable widow to leave their place in emergency situations
  - Legal policy measures must be implemented by government bodies and actively demanded by Civil Society Organizations
- Promote widow' s unique roles as peace builders and peace makers
  - Implementation of UNSCR 1325 through widows groups in the villages
  - Widows should act against any violence at home and in their communities (villages)
  - Widows should share their struggles and experiences with their local communities
  - Widows should form networks with other widows of all fractions and promote dialogs and mediation between conflict parties
  - Individual competences of widows should be strengthened so that they can act as change makers
- Many widows of war have also been victims of rape and sexual violence, forced prostitution and trafficking by criminals
  - Create immediate relief and trauma centre/ psychological counselling in the villages
  - Formulate strong law and policies to punish the culprit
  - Training on UNSCR 1325 to police, security forces, government officials, peace keepers , civil societies
  - Tackling Domestic and Sexual gender based Violence and promoting widows Human Rights
  - Government and Civil Society Organizations should conduct preventive actions such as measures for reintegration
  - Government should establish international mechanisms to protect victims and catch perpetrators
  - Knowledge of media should be strengthened and information campaigns launched
  - Family courts and victims networks should be established at local level

# Group 2: Resource Mobilization and Aid Effectiveness for Widows Globally to Contribute to the Millennium Development Goals

Facilitated by: Anindit Roy Chowdhury and Pushpa Ghimire

## Resources we have

- Human resource
- Organizational power
- Inherent skills
- Leadership, team work, confidence
- Positive religious values
- Indigenous knowledge
- Community resources- Agri , forest, local level institutions, rural roads, schools etc...
- Legal institutions, policies and Action plans.
- Central and local government budget

## The Issues/Problems Relating to Widows in the Context of MDGs

- Poverty trap among widows
- Lower access to land and property
- Socio-cultural, economic and political exclusion
- Lower access to credit, technologies, and marketing know-how
- Increased work load among widows
- Climate change and its negative consequences among widows
- Impact of financial, economic and debt crises on widows
- Inadequate and insufficient data about widowhood

## Intervention Strategies

- Organization at national level
- Formal and non-formal education packages
- Need based and area specific skill development
- Job creation: reservation at least 10 percent
- Practical implementation of equal property rights as well as widow's right

- Equal access to opportunities
- Credit on group guarantee basis

## Advocating for the Rights of Widows towards Achieving the MDGs:

- At least 10 percent of national budget and 7 percent of foreign aid will be directed/ implemented to gender equality goals, with specific target set for widows.
- Principles of aid effectiveness should especially align and accountable to the goal of widows' socio-economic empowerment and poverty reduction.
  - Special monitoring indicators should be developed about this
- All the major donors and the UN agencies should mobilize their resources towards addressing the poverty and human rights abuses of widows.
  - They should bring special package program with sufficient resources for conflict affected widows and their children.
- Gender responsive budgeting, as a major tool to bring aid effectiveness, should be widows responsive too.
  - Its indicators and supporting indicators should be redefined from widows human rights perspectives.
- All the MDGs should specifically be analyzed from widows' human rights perspectives
  - policy, plan and programs should be formulated accordingly by allocating sufficient resource for them.
- A data baseline on widows, their families and their living conditions worldwide must be established.
  - The process and methodology used to collect this data must be tailored

# Group 3: Mobilizing Widows For Reducing Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Facilitated by: Dr Masuma Hasan and Srijana Lohani

## Introduction

Gender Based Violence (GBV) is a global phenomenon and it is not particular to individual country as such.

Violence is always a matter of power and suppression.

Around the world, GBV has a greater impact on women and girls than on men and boys.

The term “gender-based violence” is often used interchangeably with the term “violence against women.”

The term “gender-based violence” highlights the relationship between females’ subordinate status in society and their increased vulnerability to violence.

## As a Result of This Violence

- Women encounter enormous social consequences
- Increased risk for both short and long-term mental, sexual and reproductive health outcomes
- Any one of these abuses can leave deep psychological scars
- Damage the health of women and girls in general, including their reproductive and sexual health
- In some instances, results in death.
- All are unacceptable violations of human rights.
- Together they form a huge obstacle to gender equality and genuine human progress.

## Existing Gender Based Violence Against Widows and its Impact

### III Cultural and Traditional Practices in Asia

- Verbal harassment
- Husband eater
- Blamed for the death of her husband
- Inauspicious
- Throw all the jewelries
- Follow code of conducts
- Made invisible and inactive
- Forced to remain within households
- Remain vegetarian
- Not allowed to wear colorful dresses and must wear dull colors
- Restricted in their mobility
- Honor killings
- Sexual assault
- Early marriage
- Incest
- Prostitution
- Genital mutilation ( vagina stitched )
- Infanticide (girl child)
- Dowry-related violence
- Trafficking of women and girls
- Several harmful traditional practices
- Polygamy



- forced to drink the water that is used in cleaning the body of her dead husbands.
- made to eat with unwashed plates
- Have sexual relationship with male family members to inherit property
- have to sleep with their brother in law on the first night of their husband's death
- cheated by their family members and are often thrown out of their houses.
- Face extra work burden
- Health hazard
- No moral or financial support from families members and are forced to live on their own with their children
- No Social Security for widows

## Harmful Traditional Practices, Vaikalya (Child Widows)

The early marriage system is common in Nepalese society, particularly in the Terai region. In the Terai, young girls are engaged to be married before their first menstruation. The only part of the marriage ceremony that does not take place is the ritualistic sending off of the new bride with dowry to the husband's home. The groom waits for the bride to reach puberty, which comes with her first menstruation. Unfortunately in many cases, it is common for the husbands to die even before the bride sets foot in her husband's home. Such girls who are widowed in childhood under these kinds of circumstances are known as Vaikalya's

## Witchcraft Accusations and Female Homicide Victimization

- There are problems with the term GBV, both in itself and in the way it is used in so-called 'witch-hunts' in some rural areas in India , Nepal, Ghana, Africa and also in different countries around the world.
- forced to have human stool
- beaten up
- thrown out their community
- also in some cases kill them
- Widows are seen as curse

## Domestic Violence

- Widows are treated in very demeaning ways
- lack of access to deceased husband's property and face stigma leading to discrimination and poverty

## Impacts

### Impacts at Individual and Family Level

- The above mentioned religious and traditional practices have become harmful towards a widow's physical health and mental state of mind, further aggravating her suffering and lowering her status in society.
- Most of the children face discrimination at school and at community after their mother become widows
- Most of the children have to drop out from the school due to financial constraint faced by their mother after becoming widows
- The ordeal faced by single women (widows) /mothers and their children makes them vulnerable to abuse, disempowerment and in the worst cases, psychological trauma
- Due to poverty faced by widows , it has direct impact on their health

### Sexual Violence and Trafficking

- The young widows are economically dependent on their families for survival and due to this most of the widows faced sexual harassment and domestic violence at the hand of family members
- The most common perpetrators of sexual harassment towards a widow are her father-in-law and brother-in-law as per the experience of WHR.
- The high number of cases of physical assault or mistreatment towards widows by members of the husband's family the children of single mothers often have limited



access to education, healthy nutrition and are generally marginalized. They are in turn vulnerable to trafficking and other forms of violence.

- The social discrimination that exists in the Terai region of Nepal makes it almost impossible for child widows to raise a voice against such prejudices. Therefore, they silently bear the brunt of domestic and sexual violence and are often victims of human trafficking.

## Conflict Zone

- Sole Responsible as bread winner
- Homelessness and Displacement
- no basic needs
- Property grabbing and chasing off
- Lack of access to health services
- Isolated
- Sexual assault and harassment
- Rape

## Measures in Country Context

- **Family court for widows** to settle down the problem faced by them. These family court should be at all Village level
- Advocacy at policy level to change discriminatory policies and also Widows voices heard at all levels
- Form children's and single women (widows) groups and mobilize them as change agents

- Special program launched for child widows and lobby for them at national to international level
- Provide livelihood training and income generating activities for interested widows and Create employment opportunities for widows
- Establish safe space for widows and provide immediate relief and services
- psycho social counseling and health checkup
- Mapping and profiling
- Advocacy with government
- Organize widows as a pressure group
- Awareness and Advocacy

## Measures at International Level

- Building Global Networking to fight against GBV against widows
- Strong implementation of International human rights instruments like CEDAW, 1325, 1820
- Implementation of Widows Charters
- Commission a special rapporteur on violence against widows at UN
- Violence against widows should be considered as crime by International Human rights instruments
- Incorporation of the issues of widowhood into National and International agenda

# Group 4: Significance of Human Rights for the protection of Widows' Rights – The Way Forward

Facilitated by: Margaret Owen and Kabita Pandey

- Human rights are universal, inalienable and belong to all men, women and children irrespective of age, marital status, religion or ethnicity.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted without dissent by the United Nations in 1948, recognizes the
- “Equal and inalienable rights” of all people, “without distinction of any kind.”
- Violence against women contravenes a number of the fundamental human rights (the right to security of person; the right not to be held in slavery or subjected to inhuman treatment; the right to equal protection and treatment; and the right not to be discriminated on the ground of marital status).
- The universal standards of human rights are often denied full operation when it comes to the rights of women.”
- The lack of specific concern and recognition of the abuse of widow in the International Human Rights instruments allow states to violate widows Human rights around the globe.
- Why widows’ are invisible and ignored at all International Human Rights instruments ?

## Challenges

- To date no International human rights Conventions, Declarations, Resolutions or Action Plans specifically refer to widows. But they do mention gender issues and women. Recalling that the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted to exclusively use the pronoun “he”, we can see some progress!
- Despite State ratifications of international laws and a plethora of legislation to comply with these, widows continue to be deprived of their rights due to their lives being determined at the local level by interpretations of custom, tradition and religions,

## In the Context of Widows’

- Widows continue to be excluded from the progress made in raising the status of millions of the World’s Women. (CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, and the UN SCR 1325 & 1820 etc.)
- Widows are denied their basic human rights, civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights,
- Their crucial roles in society, in development, in peace building, and sole supporters of families has been ignored.

## Recommendations

- A network of widows to utilize the existing international human rights machinery.
- The Government must recognize the widows’ knowledge and use this to inform their policy making and national development.
- With reference to Article 4 of CEDAW on the requirements for State Parties to modify

discriminatory social attitudes and to eliminate harmful traditional practices in relation to widowhood, the government should support all forms of informal and formal education programmes to promote status of widows in the family, community and society in general.

WHR should use the processes in the broad range in International Human Rights mechanisms including the human rights treaties committees, human rights council and other UN opportunities to publishes widows' issues. For example, by submitting shadow reports to these international bodies,

and lobbying their government delegations participating in relevant international and regional fora, providing them with evidence-based information on human rights breaches and appropriate data.

At District and local level, the widows members of the groups should systematically record all illustrations of human rights abuses perpetuated against widows.

**NO HUMAN RIGHTS WITHOUT WIDOWS RIGHTS  
NO WIDOWS' NO PEACE**

Thank You

WHR Nepal

# Annex 11 The Kathmandu Widows' Declaration

## 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 : 25<sup>th</sup> of June, 2010



## Some Glimpses of International Conference



Participants registering their names



Participants during the conference



Dr. Masuma Hasan lighting candles during inauguration session



Welcoming Honourable Minister Sarwadev Prasad Ojha



International participants with WHR representatives



WHR staff members



Peace rally organized before the opening ceremony of the conference



Discussion on group work

## Some Glimpses of International Conference



Kedar Poudel chairing the second session of country paper presentation



Atma Ram Pandey chairing the first session of country paper presentation



Participants during the conference



During group exercise



Ratna Kaji Bajracharya (center) chairing the session of thematic paper presentation and discussion



Mahendra Prasad Shrestha chairing the session of Kathmandu Widows' Declaration



Sanju Timilsina, a young single woman from Jumla district handing over gesture of appreciation to participant



Display of products made by single women







## Women for Human Rights, single women group

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