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Advancement of women

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Addressing the situation of widows

The General Assembly,

Recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹ the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,² the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,³ the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,⁴ the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,⁵ the Convention on the Rights of the Child,⁶ the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,⁷ the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families,⁸ the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples⁹ and

* On behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of African States.

** In order for the General Assembly to take action on the present proposal, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of agenda item 29 and to consider it directly in plenary meeting.

¹ See resolution 217 A (III).

² See resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

³ Ibid.

⁴ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 660, No. 9464.

⁵ Ibid., vol. 1249, No. 20378.

⁶ Ibid., vol. 1577, No. 27531.

⁷ Ibid., vol. 2515, No. 44910.

⁸ Ibid., vol. 2220, No. 39481.

⁹ Resolution 61/295, annex.



other relevant international human rights instruments and principles of international humanitarian law,

Reaffirming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,¹⁰ which addresses the need to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, in order to ensure that no one is left behind and to reach the furthest behind first, and that the systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is crucial,

Affirming that ensuring and promoting the full realization of all human rights, including the right to development, and fundamental freedoms for all women and girls is critical to achieving all Sustainable Development Goals and targets,

Reaffirming the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action¹¹ and their review outcomes, which are aimed at promoting and protecting the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women and girls throughout their life course and at achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, while recognizing that some women and girls, especially widows, face particular barriers to their empowerment,

Reaffirming also the right of every human being, without distinction of any kind, to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including sexual and reproductive health-care services, and recalling the political declaration of the high-level meeting on universal health coverage,¹²

Recognizing that all aspects of life for widows in many parts of the world are negatively affected by various economic, social and cultural factors, such as lack of access to inheritance, land tenure, employment and/or livelihood, social safety nets, health care and education, harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, including levirate, recalling the importance of positive steps on the part of Member States to support widows as an integral part of society, and in this regard recalling also resolution [65/189](#) of 21 December 2010,

Recognizing also that laws, policies, customs, traditions and practices that act to restrict women's, including widows', equal access to credit and loans also prevent them from owning and inheriting land, property and housing and exclude them from participating fully in development processes, and that they are discriminatory and contribute to increasing the poverty of women and girls,

Reaffirming that States should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to the fulfilment of the human rights of all women and girls, including widows, while recognizing the important role that family, culture, society and religion, including the key role of communal and religious leaders, can play in the care and support for widows,

Recognizing the importance of a revitalized global partnership to ensure the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and other voluntary commitments by Member States to further its implementation,

Recognizing also that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has a disproportionately heavy impact on women and girls, and may have increased the prevalence of widowhood, and that responses to the COVID-19 pandemic need to be gender-responsive and take into account all forms of violence, discrimination, stigmatization, exclusion and inequality,

¹⁰ Resolution [70/1](#).

¹¹ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

¹² Resolution [74/2](#).

Noting with regret the absence of high-quality, reliable, timely and disaggregated data and gender statistics on the estimates of widowhood and particular information on the needs and roles of widows, which prevents comprehensive and useful analysis and policy action,

Deeply concerned that widows in certain parts of the world continue to be subjected to discriminatory and violent mourning rites and harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, including levirate, and are further subjected to forced and unpaid domestic labour,

Recognizing that widows in many parts of the world continue to experience disproportionate economic hardship and exclusion, lack of employment, and a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, and that the economic empowerment and financial inclusion of widows is a critical factor for their enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, in the eradication of poverty and the realization of the 2030 Agenda and in the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls,

Deeply concerned that millions of widows and their children face hunger, malnutrition, difficult access to health-care services, water, sanitation and hygiene, loss of schooling and illiteracy, and in this regard recognizing the intergenerational disadvantages that the children of widows can face in specific situations, including economic insecurity, that can lead to withdrawal from education, child labour, forced or involuntary displacement, harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, and all forms of violence, discrimination and exploitation,

Recognizing the need to ensure that widows have equal access to the full range of social services, social protection and/or social security measures, equal access to and control of economic resources and their empowerment through access to financial and infrastructure services, with special focus on the provision of support to older widows, indigenous widows, widows with disabilities, and widows belonging to ethnic and religious minorities who often have access to few resources and are often in vulnerable situations,

Expressing deep concern regarding the increased vulnerability of widows to all forms of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations and humanitarian emergencies,

1. *Calls upon* Member States, the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations, within their respective mandates, to acknowledge the situation of widows and urgently address all forms of discrimination, violence, marginalization, stigmatization and exclusion experienced in certain parts of the world by widows of all ages and to work towards eliminating all forms of discrimination against widows and ending harmful practices;

2. *Calls upon* Member States to ensure, and other stakeholders to promote, the leadership and full, equal and meaningful participation of widows, as appropriate, in all decision-making processes, without discrimination of any kind, and in the design, implementation and evaluation of relevant global and national COVID-19 post-recovery policies;

3. *Strongly condemns* all forms of discrimination and violence against widows, recognizing that discrimination and violence are an impediment to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and to the full realization of all human rights;

4. *Calls upon* Member States to take appropriate measures to establish domestic processes for registering and recognizing all marriages, in accordance with domestic legislation and justice systems, while eliminating child, early and forced marriage, and to ensure that widows have full access to inheritance and social protection as well as legal support, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities, and health-care services, including mental health;

5. *Also calls upon* Member States to develop, strengthen and implement comprehensive social protection systems that take into account the needs of widows and their children, as well as widowed girls or adult widows who were married as girls, including, where necessary, by listing widows among those who are in vulnerable situations in these systems and by strengthening social services and child protection systems, protection mechanisms, such as safe shelters, access to justice and essential health-care services, nutrition, education and training, targeted cash transfers and other essential goods and services;

6. *Further calls upon* Member States to eliminate any barriers, legal inconsistencies and discriminatory policies and laws, where they exist, that impede the rights of all women, including widows, to access to, use of, ownership of and control over land, property and inheritance rights, including diverse types of land tenure, and ensure equal access to justice and legal assistance in this regard, including to protect the rights of widows within inheritance regimes and with regard to the allocation of marital property;

7. *Calls upon* Member States to remove all discriminatory laws and policies, where they exist, that prohibit or hinder widows' access to capital and decent work, and to mainstream a gender perspective in the design and implementation of policies and programmes that promote and protect widows' economic and financial inclusion and right to decent work, in collaboration with all relevant sectors and stakeholders, including civil society, women's organizations and academia;

8. *Encourages* Member States to implement policies that ensure and leverage women's economic empowerment by supporting the full and productive participation of women in the labour market, including widows, women with disabilities, women living in poverty and women heads of households, to promote equal pay for equal work or work of equal value and access to childcare services and to promote their meaningful participation in the economy and in decision-making processes at all levels;

9. *Also encourages* Member States to incorporate financial instruments, such as bonds and credit lines, aimed at supporting widows in their countries to become economically independent and to work on their own businesses or entrepreneurship, at achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, at promoting control, ownership and management by women, including widows, and at ensuring their participation in all sectors and levels of the economy, including by mobilizing sufficient financial resources, and building capacity and technology transfer as mutually agreed;

10. *Urges* Member States to strongly condemn and eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, including harmful practices, such as harmful mourning and burial rites, female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage, including levirate, recognizing that discrimination and violence are an impediment to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and to the full realization of all human rights, and also urges Member States to address the situation of widows of all ages and their children within national policies and action plans, with the goal of eliminating violence against women and of ending harmful practices, to ensure justice and end the impunity of perpetrators of

violence against women, including widows and their children, and ensure access to health-care services, including sexual and reproductive health;

11. *Recognizes* the important role that families can play in combating social exclusion, gender stereotypes and negative social norms with regard to widows, as well as the role of public and community support to widows who are isolated and without support from their biological or marital families, and highlights the importance of investing in inclusive family-oriented policies and programmes to reduce inequality and promote the well-being of all persons of all ages, as well as to contribute to better outcomes for children and other family members in vulnerable situations and to help to break the intergenerational transfer of poverty;

12. *Encourages* Member States to take into account the needs and perspectives of widows of all ages and ensure their full, equal and meaningful participation at all decision-making levels and at all stages of peace processes, peacebuilding and mediation efforts, including in the prevention and resolution of armed conflicts and in post-conflict reconstruction, in accordance with the women and peace and security agenda;

13. *Calls upon* Member States to recognize and respond to the need of widows for increased protection in vulnerable situations, including in humanitarian emergencies, and the challenges that arise because of the discrimination, violence, marginalization, stigmatization and exclusion that widows may face, and stresses the need to ensure that their specific needs are identified and addressed in emergency preparedness and response efforts;

14. *Also calls upon* Member States to collect and analyse high-quality, timely, reliable and globally comparable data on the status of widows, disaggregated by age, sex, income, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographical location or other characteristics relevant in national contexts, in order to close the existing information gap on widowhood and ensure that future surveys and censuses accurately report on household composition and the relationships of household members and female heads of households and correctly designate widowhood status, and in this regard calls upon Member States to provide support for developing countries for capacity-building on data collection;

15. *Encourages* the United Nations system to incorporate the issue of widowhood into its action to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development¹³ and other relevant global commitments;

16. *Requests* the Secretary-General, within existing resources, to report to the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session on the implementation of the present resolution and to take steps to integrate the issue of widows in his relevant reports.

¹³ *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5–13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.