

**Wednesday 31 October**  
**9.30 - 11.00 am**  
 Baha'i International  
 Community  
 866 UN Plaza, # 120  
 New York 10017

rsvp:  
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Nigeria: The thousand widows of Maiduguri Photo ICRC



# Widows: Survivors of Conflict

**Widowhood in all its forms is insufficiently recognised as a human rights issue. Conflict leads to a massive increase in widows who continue to suffer from the myriad disadvantages of widowhood.**

**This interactive panel of experts and activists will highlight the challenges, best practice, possible solutions and key actions for implementation.**



Widows of war Iraq Photo OWFI/MADRE



Guild of Service; home for war widows Vrindavan

**Chair: Zarin Hainsworth OBE - Chair WRI**  
**Speakers:**  
 Dianah Kamande - Come Together Widows and Orphans Organization  
 Nicole Mecca – Global Fund for Widows  
 Ranjit Jayanti - UN Representative Guild of Service  
 Abigail Seakins – NAWO YWA  
 Lowri Shepherd/Elena Marquez Espada – NAWO YWA



**WIDOWS DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION**



**ROZARIA MEMORIAL TRUST**



**NAWO**  
 Connecting Women

# programme

9.30 PROMPT start

Zarin Hainsworth OBE - "Introduction and welcome"

Dianah Kamande - Come together widows and orphans - "Widowhood: the loss of human rights"

Nicole Mecca - Global Fund for Widows - "Economic independence - moving widows forward"

Ranjit Jayanti - UN Representative Guild of Service - "Survivors of conflict, agents of peace; Guild of Service work with conflict widows"

Abigail Seakins - "The importance of access to education for post conflict widows"

Lowri Shepherd/Elena Marquez Espada - "Key actions for conflict child widows"

Q&A

10.55 Thanks

11.00 Close

## Organisations working on widows supporting this event:

Guild of Service (India), Global Fund for Widows, Come together widows and orphans (Kenya), Widows Development Organisation (Nigeria), WUNRN, Naserian (Tanzania), Rozaria Memorial Trust, Women Initiative for Leadership Strategy & Innovation in Africa (Women Africa), Centre for women and development, Women of Purpose Uganda, Radha Paddle Foundation, Widows for Peace through Democracy, Women for Human Rights, single women group (WHR), NAWO, ADVANCE

## Overview

UNSCR 1325 was passed and ratified in 2000, yet 18 years later and with numerous related resolutions since, there is still a way to go to ensure the full implementation of 1325. In the developing world, when widows lose their husbands they suffer the loss of their household income and assets, they lack favourable inheritance rights and support from their social surroundings and their government. Continually they suffer violations of their basic human rights and suffer from violence and harmful traditional practices.

Most have little or no education or training in any basic skills and in addition to the difficulties facing these widows, they can not provide any financial means of their own.

Widowhood in all its forms is insufficiently recognised as a human rights issue. Conflict leads to a massive increase in widows who continue to suffer from the myriad disadvantages of widowhood. The overarching goal for organisations helping these women such as 'Global Fund for Widows' is to empower them and provide them with the skills, support and opportunities that they require in order to enhance their own capabilities, as well as promoting and protecting their human rights as survivors.



## The Panel

### **Dianah Kamande**

Dianah Kamande holds a Diploma in Women in leadership and Governance in Africa from Nairobi University and a BA in Governance and Conflict studies from African Nazarene University . She is the founder of Cometogether widows and orphans organization and champions for Widows Rights, Survivors of Gender violence and Orphans rights in Kenya. Dianah was the first person to represent the plight of widows in the Kenyan government and also drafted the Widowhood bill after realizing gaps in the Kenya constitution that have always led to widows abuse. Through her advocacy Kenya started to celebrate international widows day in 2016 in a big way funded by the Ministry of Public Services, Youth and Gender Affairs. Through her organisation's advocacy widows have taken seats on several committees in government.

### **Nicole Mecca**

Nicole Mecca graduated from Quinnipiac University in 2018 with a degree in Psychology and Global Public Health. While in college, she worked closely on the issue of human rights locally and globally through course work, travel opportunities, and a fellowship. Currently, Nicole is working with Global Fund for Widows to further their mission promoting the rights of widows while she applies to law school beginning a career in international human rights law.

### **Abigail Seakins**

Abigail attends Stroud High School Sixth Form in the United Kingdom, where she studies A Levels in English Literature, Geography and Biology. She is a keen athlete. Abigail enjoys reading, and is looking forward to studying BA English Literature at University. Abigail is a member of NAWO Young Women's Alliance and is keen to further her passion and knowledge surrounding human rights, particularly concerning women. She says " I am hoping to highlight the importance of education, in particular for widows of conflict and the challenges and hardships that widows face."

## **Ranjit Jayanti**

Mrs. Ranjit Jayanti is currently a volunteer representative for the Guild of Service, of Delhi, India, at the United Nations in New York. Guild of Service has been advocating for rights of widows in India which number over 43 million, for over four decades. Dr. Mohini Giri, Chairperson of the Guild of Service together with Margaret Owen of U.K., Director of Widows for Peace & Democracy have been pioneers in promoting the cause of widows at the U.N. The Guild of Service, under the leadership of Meera Khanna (Vice Chair) has spearheaded the global alliance "The Last Woman First" which is an advocacy platform for the cause of the most vulnerable women.

Ranjit worked in several capacities with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for nearly 24 years. She has traveled and lived in Switzerland, England, France, Djibouti, Costa Rica, The Netherlands, Japan, Hong Kong, Indonesia and the United States of America. She speaks English, Spanish and French. She was born and raised in India and continued her education in Geneva & Costa Rica apart from the Home Economics degree from Delhi University. She is a member of the NGO/NY Executive Committee on Ageing and also a member of the NGO Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

## **Lowri Shepherd**

Lowri is a 17 year old Stroud High School student from the UK studying Maths, Physics and Biology. She hopes to continue studying Biomedical sciences at university with a personal interest in development particularly in the Global South and is excited for the opportunity to speak on child windows as part of the WPS anniversary events.

She is interested in health and fitness therefore her hobbies include competitive athletics and dance as well as having the Sports Leader role for her house in school, having to organise various sports events through each season. Lowri has volunteered to tutor a younger student in Mathematics every week to prepare them for their exams in the summer which is improving her personal communication skills. She is keen to develop her understanding of equality and gender issues and looking forward to learning from WPS experts and activists.

## **Elena Marquez Espada**

Elena Marquez Espada is a student at Stroud High School UK. She is currently studying Spanish, English Literature and Geography with the intention to study International Relations and Spanish at University. Through her A-Level studies she has gained a deep concern for the welfare of child widows in the Global South. In her free time, she is a member of her local riding club and rides regularly whilst balancing her own research into the rights for women and the changing world. Elena is a member of NAWO YWA and the FemSoc in Stroud High School. She is passionate about gender issues and the humanitarian rights that women worldwide should have. Elena is very keen to be involved in this event. She says, "Although NGOs and worldwide organisations are supporting child widows in the world today, I want to raise the awareness of key actions that everyone can take to support both the child widows who are suffering as a result of conflict today and the child widows of the future."

## **Zarin Hainsworth OBE**

Zarin founded Serene Communications Ltd in 1997. It has proven a successful tool for supporting the family and undertaking interesting and useful work and now runs as a family run social enterprise. Clients range from multi-nationals, UN agencies, Government departments to small charities. It is a values family based business that aspires to align every aspect of work with ethical principles and of the Baha'i Faith. Zarin creates training programmes that use the latest research and ethical ideas that aim to stimulate and inspire the participants to realise their full potential. Serene also provides learning and service opportunity trips for mixed age groups that provide eco-tourism and life-changing experiences. She currently assists organisations to create an enabling environment for women and an effective action plan to ensure equal pay and boards.

Zarin is Chair of Widows Rights International, National Alliance of Women's Organisations UK, and of the UK NGO CSW Alliance. The latter is a coalition of all the organisations based in the UK working with UN agencies for women and girls. It represents civil society to Government and works closely with the UK Government Equalities Office.

Zarin has been a trustee of WRI for a number of years, advocating for the right of widows with evens in the UK parliament, UN Human Rights Council and CSW. She organised an event for MENA female headed households for UN Women in 2014 and trained widows from around the world to participate in UN processes. She founded Naserian, now a registered charity in Tanzania, for Maasai widows. It is run for and by Maasai widows and has been highly successful in positively changing the lives of women and children across the community.

Further to CSW 2000 and the special session of the GA in June 2000 which she attended and where the SC announced the need for a WPS resolution, Zarin has been involved in WPS since that time. She suggested to Joan Ruddock MP the need for a Parliamentary All Party Group in the UK which was established by Joan with Zarin as civil society focal point. The APPG WPS remains active and clerked by Gender Action for Peace and Security of which Zarin was a founding member.

Zarin established the NAWO Young Women's Alliance in 2005 and enables young women and men to attend events at the UN and be fully engaged in UN processes becoming gender champions, enhancing their capacities and agency. She is a gender expert for the British Council and a member of UN Women UK. She is a past member of the National Committee of NCW UK and past President of UNIFEM UK. She is locally active and co-founded the Stroud branch of UNIFEM, Ruscombe Brook Action Group, Stroud Business Women's Network and Ruscombe Women's Group. Zarin is married with four married children. She enjoys gardening, cooking, reading and handicrafts. She is a member of the Institute of Journalists. She was awarded the OBE by Her Majesty the Queen in 2013 for her work for gender equality.



31<sup>st</sup> October  
2018  
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**NAWO YWA**  
**Authored by: Jessica**  
**Hourston**



***“provide them with the skills, support and opportunities that they require in order to enhance their own capabilities”***

## Summary of presentations

The first presentation was by Dianah Kamande from the Come Together Widows and Orphans. Dianah's presentation was on "Widowhood: the loss of human rights". She spoke about:

"Widowhood presents women who are suffering. Widows lose elevated status when she loses her husband. They are:

- Thrown out with children
- Denied rights of inheritance
- Women have to be cleansed when widowed (this can include rape from their deceased husband's family which can lead to STIs) sexual diseases.

In a man's absence the woman is useless and can be sold for sex. They lose their human rights.

- Become threatened in their own home
- Subject to physical and sexual abuse
- Subject to social and economic violence
- Denied access to employment
- Land ownership is not a privilege to a widow"

***“Widowhood presents women who are suffering as they lose their elevated status along with losing their husband...”***

Following Dianah, Nicole Mecca, from Global Fund for Widows spoke on ‘Economic Independence - moving widows forward’.

She said:

- There is a direct link between widowhood and poverty
- Widows are often unable to inherit their land or estate
- They can be evicted from their marital home
- They can be forced into harmful practices e.g. sex with strangers
- Their nationality can be revoked
- They can be subjected to economic violence
- They often face no prospect of work once their husband dies
- The Global Fund for Widows have empowered 10,000 widows so far

***“We need to continue to advocate for a more systematic involvement of women in conflict prevention for attaining sustainable peace and security”***

The next speaker, Ranjit Jayanti, spoke about “Survivors of conflict, agents of peace; Guild of Service work with conflict widows”

Ranjit spoke about experiences of widows from India and the troubles that they face back home post conflict:

- The resulting damage of destruction of life caused by the India/Pakistan conflict left many women and children destitute and displaced.
- Widows in India are living a life of poverty, neglect and are being deprived their natural human rights.
- They become ostracised from their communities.
- There are over 43 million widows living in India.

Ranjit spoke about the work that the Guild of Service has been undertaking in order to advocate for their rights. The Guild started an ongoing program in Kashmir to help women and children in violence affected zones. They provide legal and family counselling as well as financial and emotional support.

Ranjit said ‘We need to continue to advocate for a more systematic involvement of women in conflict prevention for attaining sustainable peace and security’



Following Ranjit's speech, a brief intermission was allowed for audience discussion to exchange ideas and reflections from the presentations so far especially in regard to conflict situations.

The first speaker following this intermission was Abigail, who spoke on "The importance of access to education for post conflict widows". Her presentation can be found in full at the end of the report.

Imagine that you have just lost your husband due to extreme conflict in your home country. Your life is torn apart, you are left as the sole supporter of the rest of your family and you have no way to provide sufficient income. It is hard to see how you will survive along with your many children. The pain caused by the loss of your husband is magnified by the loss of almost every freedom you had as a married woman. While this may be one of the most distressing things you could imagine, it is the reality for millions of women worldwide...

To put the number of widows into a global perspective, research has shown that the current estimated number of widowed women that there are in the world today, is 32 times the number of New York's population, 258.5 million. This figure doesn't even take into account the number of women and girls who were once widowed but forced to re-marry for economic and cultural reasons, most likely against their own free will.



***“Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress...”***

In many cultures where it is frowned upon for women to be single, it is common for a widow to be taken in or ‘inherited’ by her late husband’s brother. These values stem from deep-rooted, traditional societal attitudes, whereby a woman only has a social status through a man. In the absence of her husband, a widow becomes irrelevant within her community, which ultimately leads to lifelong trauma and misfortune. Unfortunately 2 million widows living in Afghanistan have lost their husbands to the ongoing conflict which has battered their country for well over 3 decades. Afghanistan is one of the world’s most prolific producers of orphans and widows, yet their suffering is tremendously hidden. An estimated 94% of these widows are illiterate and unaware of their rights, making them extremely vulnerable and viewed traditionally as unequals with no personal social identity.

Education is needed to help determine a widow’s future, keep her out of risk of gender-based violence and give back her rightful independence. When a woman gains her financial and personable independence, her skill sets and knowledge will grow, and so will her horizons.

After Abigail spoke, the final speakers Lowri and Elena provided insights on “Key actions for conflict child widows”. The full text of the presentation can be found at the end of the report.

The number of child widows worldwide is increasing as a result of conflict. Widowhood is one of the most overlooked human rights issues, with there being approximately 258.5 million widows around the world. The lack of media attention to child widows is serious...

According to the UN website, around 12 million girls per year are married before the age of 18 - that’s more than the population of Belgium with around 3-4 million of them living in conflict zones...Due to early marriage they can be as young as 7 years old.



***“We need a future that supports child widows and views them as potential active agents of positive change.”***

Key actions:

1. Education: Child widowhood is not addressed sufficiently . We believe information regarding child widows should be incorporated into the compulsory Personal Development lessons by the UK Government and similar processes in other countries personal stories are the most effective tool to enhance understanding therefore children aged 10 to 15 in the Global North should hear stories from child widows especially those from the Global South.
2. Financial aid: After girls lose their husbands, they lose any access to family income and are left with no money. As Nicole has shown economic independence is vital. Action needs to be taken to teach child widows a skill to provide their own income.
3. Harmful traditional practices: There is insufficient media coverage and general awareness of widows and child widows. Article 24 of the CRC articulates that ‘nations take appropriate measures to abolish traditional practices affecting the health of children’. Yet, in many traditional communities, widows are robbed of their rights.



## Summary

This event was a great opportunity for members of many organisations to speak about the work they have undertaken in promoting the profile of widows and the work that is yet to be done.

The event was well received by the audience and the discussion and Q&As were insightful and thought provoking, leaving everyone feeling motivated to create change and promote the voice of Widow's post conflict.

***“They should not be mere recipients of aid or pity, but given the tools to become protagonists in shaping their own futures and that of their communities..”***