



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 4

**Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Women's Federation for World Peace International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2022]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.

## **Deteriorating Human Rights Situation of Widows in Ukraine**

Widows affected by conflict are placed in extremely vulnerable positions which have life threatening consequences for both the women and their offspring. Children of widows are more likely to be forced into sex trafficking or into the child pornography industry, while widows in conflict are often left homeless and without protection or financial support. This is especially true for those whose husbands are missing, as inheritance funds are often inaccessible.

Victims or future resource?

The Russia / Ukraine conflict has created a significant number of widows, on top of the widows who existed prior to the war. In active warzones, the rate of widowhood can be as high as 80 per cent. UN has an obligation to protect these most vulnerable women whose lives can be turned around if provided with support and opportunity at the right time. Their courageous stance in front of tanks and incredible stamina in holding their families and communities together underground for months have been etched into our minds and hearts of the global community. However, this takes a toll and the trauma takes time to heal. Their bravery and sacrifice deserve a dignified treatment, sometimes psychological therapy and avoidance of victimised stereotypes. Timing is critical.

Women's Federation for World Peace International stands in solidarity with the widows, victims of conflict and displacement. We recognise the situation is ongoing and volatile thus it is difficult to gather accurate data that fully addresses the issue of widowhood. However, the plight of widows in conflict is often overlooked, their data, not disaggregated. Over six UN Conventions are currently being violated.

We call on the UN to recognise the unique situation of widows, as well as urging the UN to use their influence to work with the international community to offer protection for this group of women. We strongly insist a steadfast position is adopted on the protection of widows and their right to freedom from torture and inhumane treatment and ensure this security is extended long term.

Protection now, an investment for post conflict reconstruction

The outcomes of today shall not only influence the lives of widows and wives of the missing, but of their children, families who suffer the aggravated loss of their parent, care giver. Consequences reach far into the future. Widows are often neglected in conflict, and their security must be of the utmost priority, for fear of escalation into other human rights abuses.

We have seen the capability for inhumane practices during conflict, notably towards women, thus the intersectional and unique position of widows raises serious concerns for their safety.

The universal access to security is an essential foundation for all, especially in conflict zones. Offering protection to widows is essential to enable a promising future for both Ukraine and Russia. In the context of conflict-prone and post-conflict situations, women and notably widows are targeted in gender-based violence amongst other war crimes, and the intensity of this violence is exacerbated by the conflict. We applaud the UN in its recent passing of a resolution titled 'Addressing the Situation of Widows'. However, further action must be taken to ensure protection specifically for widows affected by this conflict must be addressed today.

With this in mind, we strongly ask the UN Human Rights Council to consider the following:

Facilitating accurate data collection: Warzones restrict the ability to achieve a true understanding of human rights abuses. We request that UN bodies work with NGOs, civil society and the international community to investigate and obtain accurate figures on widowhood and their unique situation.

Focus on humanitarian aid: The UN must work with organisations in both Ukraine and Russia to ensure that humanitarian aid is able to reach widows and their families in the warzone. We insist that UN Bodies urge member states, notably those who border Ukraine and Russia to allow complete cooperation in delivering humanitarian aid. We urge the international community to call on Russia to keep borders open so this aid can be delivered.

Commission a special report on widows in conflict: This should be completed with the aim to appoint a special rapporteur of the secretary general on Widowhood to compliment the data collection effort.

The media: It is of the utmost importance that clear and fear-free reporting of the situation of widowhood on the ground can be achieved. We urge the international community and the UN to insist that Russia allow for transparent coverage of the war atrocities. The media is essential to allow peace to ensue, for both Ukraine and civil society.

UN and government support: Partnership and funding for humanitarian and counselling for widows, necessary in both Ukraine and Russia, especially for programs that empower rather than victimise.

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