

# Widows and Orphans Movement (WOM)

MOTTO: TRUST IN GOD

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ACTIVITY: INTERNATIONAL WIDOWS' DAY CELEBRATION

DATE: 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2014



## INTRODUCTION

The first widow's conference, organized by Widows Rights International, was held in February 2001 in UK. Eleven African countries were invited with the Widows and Orphans Movement

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representing Ghana. Each of these countries were given a resolution which was presented to each of their governments to support and protect the numerous sufferings widows. This resolution was presented to Madam Gladys Asthma, the then Minister for Women and Children and was later to be presented to Parliament. This never materialized.

Through the help of American Embassy, WOM was able to organize its' own National Widows Day Conference in 2002 and through Action Aid Ghana, WOM was able to organize further conferences in 2010 till 2013.

The conferences are attended by participants who come from all over the country, including widows coming from the northern region and also as far as the Volta and Upper West regions. This year WOM was not fortunate to get funding to organize this year's celebration. It was not easy to call it off because the widows kept on coming to the office to ask of the day of celebration. This day has become like a Christmas day to them. WOM have to do all she can with her limited recourses to organize this year's day .For this reason we only invited only widows from the Northern and the Upper West Regions and asked that only three from each group should attend yet the number outnumbered the previous year's attendance. We had a lot of second hand clothes that was given to us during the previous years and all were distributed to them. With Ply cards the widows marched through the town from the Catholic social center, through the jubilee park, District Police station through the main hospital road and back to the center .Writings on the placards read: Widows have rights to inherit their husband's property, we toiled together, our children must go to school, we need peace to take care of our children etc.

#### **WELCOME ADDRESS**

Fati Abigail Abdulai (Director of WOM) gave the Welcome Address and in her welcome address she brought out the following issues. She said even though the Intestate succession law has some successes most widows are still unable to seek justice and this is always due to financial constraints and in few instances ignorance. She said 90% of cases that are reported to WOM office have to do with inheritance. The widow herself is seen as a property to be inherited and hence have no right to inherit the property she toiled with her husband to acquire or in some instances the property she acquired on her own.

She spoke of a book entitle the "invisible sufferers" which says many widows around the world suffer from social stigmatization and economic deprivation purely because they have lost their husband's She said the issues stated is not different from what the widows network have identified for the upper east region. Widows are accused of killing their husbands and their property taken, etc. Most of the cases which WOM recorded in 2013 and early 2014 had to do with widows losing their husband's properties hence the theme for this year' international Widows day '**Widows have the right to inherit their husband's properties'**.

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Miss Abdulai is seen in the picture delivering her welcome address

### **PRESENTATION BY THE MINISTRY OF GENDER CHILDREN AND SOCIAL PROTECTION (MGCSP)**

Madam Georgina Aberese-Ako who is the lady in-charge of Children under MGCSP also presented a paper and these were her words. Dr Ginny Shrivastave said 'The widow is an unwanted insider. She is a family member who is perceived to be inauspicious burden, her access to family resources, both physical and emotional, is all too often cut off at the time of her husband's death. Her brother in-laws always want her to leave so that they can get the land and the property that was the share of their diseased brother and so now customarily or legally the right of their widowed sister in-law and her children. Her parents in-law are usually depended on their sons for their future in old age, and so what so ever positions their sons take is usually shared by them too. Her parents thought that they had fulfilled all responsibility when they married their daughter and sent her to her in-laws for the rest of her life. Her brothers are often married and they with their wives have plans for their family which do not include bringing a widowed sister in-law into their home. Even a son if married may face a problem of sharing his family resources with his mother as relations in the family are often strained as both mother and wife compete for the affection of the male head of the family hold. Her daughter herself dependant on her husband, is seldom in a position to offer to take care of her widowed mother. She said the international widows' day is a day of focus for effective action to raise awareness and help widows and their children around the world who are suffering through

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poverty, illiteracy, HIV/AIDS, conflict and social injustice through no fault of theirs but for the loss of their husbands. She concludes by quoting the UN Secretary General Ban KI-Moon who said no woman should lose her status, livelihood or property when her husband dies, yet millions of widows in our world face persistent abuse, discrimination, disinheritance and destitution.



**Madam Georgina Aberese-Ako Delivering her speech**

### **PRESENTATION BY THE OUTGOING UPPER EAST REGIONAL MINISTER**

The outgoing Regional Minister Dr. Nsoh delivered his talk and encouraged widows never to lose hope when their husband die but to work hard to achieve the objectives of the two. He gave his personal testimony of how women have helped him to reach where he is now. He mentioned of how former first lady Nana Agyeman Rawlings got involve in the matters of women and specifically widows and this gave birth to the Intestate law 111.

To him The President and the ruling Government were prepared to help hard working women who are well organized like the Widows and Orphans Movement to reduce poverty in the Region. He congratulated WOM for her products when he inspected the stand after the program. He took keen interest in the production of Baobab seed oil and other Baobab Products like the Baobab syrup, juice and biscuits.

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The out -going Regional Minister looking keenly at the Baobab oil produced by WOM whilst Madam Betty Ayagiba explain its uses

### Checking the health status of widows

This year's celebration has been special. With the help of Ministry of health the health status of the widows were checked, this included the Blood pressure, their blood sugar level and multivitamin tablets was given to almost all.

One of the widows from Tanzui ( Asibi Anaba ) had an alarming Blood pressure when she was checked and was immediately referred to the hospital to see a doctor. We say thanks to the Regional Director of health Dr, William Awoonor who made this possible.



Widows in line for their health status to be checked

### A WORD FROM DOVVSU

Mr. Joseph Derry from DOVVSU gave a short speech on the rights widows have to own their husband's properties. He said the doors of their offices are opened to them and they should always report when they are abused.

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## **MADAM BETTY AYAGIBA'S SPEECH**

Madam Betty Ayagiba the founder of WOM used the Bible to encourage the widows never to lose hope but to continue the struggle though with numerous storms

She used Psalm 42 verse 11 where the word of God says *“why are you depressed my soul, why are you upset? Wait for God For I will again give thanks to my God for His saving intervention”* she said God will gradually remove all the obstacles if they remained in Him. In Grune language she said they should never let the death of their husbands depress, upset or confuse them for the Bible says God will not let any temptation that is above them come upon them .She said others have made it and they can also make it. She said they should concentrate on the education of their children and wait on God as the scripture said.

Apart from sharing her personal testimonies of how God has stood for her and is still standing, she told them the story of a widow who was taken to court by her in-law. She had no lawyer and the court ordered her to leave the house she and her husband built for the in-law which she did. The man kept on tormenting this widow till God finally turned the heart of the in-law' lawyer to her favor. She told them they should never expect any help from man but to work hard, live a decent life and continue to lean on God completely and they will win all their battles in this crooked world.

### **Conclusion**

Madam Charity Bukari who is the Chair person of WOM's Board chaired the function told Madam Georgina to send reports to the Minister of Gender children and social protection to come to the aid of the widows in her concluding remarks. She said it looks like those in Accra turn to forget of the North.

There was plenty food and clothing for all widows. The widows themselves testified that this celebration was the best of all other celebrations. The staff of WOM is happy that with all the obstacles the widow's day was celebrated. The widows sang their own songs and danced till they had no more strength. June 23<sup>rd</sup> is actually **“OUR DAY”** for widows: a day that puts joy into their hearts after the toils of the year and WOM hopes that in subsequent years other will like to fund the celebration.

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