

Human Rights: Millions of Widows in 'Crisis of Survival' Worldwide

One of the world's biggest poverty-alleviating organizations spotlights the huge "uphill battle" facing many of the world's 258 million widows in a just-released report.

Treatment of widows is often startlingly unfair and cruel, catapulting them into a crisis of survival, says the new global report by Texas-based Gospel for Asia (GFA World, gfa.org).

Titled "Widows Often Face Uphill Battle," (gfa.org/special-report/widows-worldwide-face-tragedy-discrimination/), it examines the different struggles faced by widows in the U.S., Africa and Asia.

Those struggles include battles over widows' benefits in America, being stripped of homes and possessions in Africa and the practice of shunning and shaming in Asia.

"In some Asian cultures, when a woman's husband dies, she's often stripped of her dignity, her worth and her human rights," said Dr. K.P. Yohannan, founder of Gospel for Asia (GFA World, gfa.org). "Many widows are deprived of their home, their property, and their possessions, leaving them destitute."

In parts of Asia, many young widows face sexual harassment and abuse, often turning to begging or prostitution to survive.

Widows in some cultures are viewed with suspicion and disgust—sometimes even branded as witches or blamed for their husband's death and shut out of community life.

'Excluded and Invisible'

“Cultural shame and prejudice often render widows excluded and invisible,” said Yohannan, whose faith-based organization supports 40 local Sisters of Compassion teams helping widows across Asia. GFA World’s support includes vocational training for widows and giving them opportunity to take part in income-generating activities, such as sewing.

These GFA World teams of visiting women provide emotional and spiritual support, praying with widows in their homes and showing them they’re not alone.

Asia, the world’s biggest continent, has an estimated 57 million widows—roughly equivalent to the populations of California and Florida combined. “On the surface, this seems like an overwhelming uphill battle,” said Yohannan, “but every time a widow receives help and encouragement, we rejoice.”

Supporting the grassroots efforts of local churches in cities and rural villages, GFA World aims to “show the love of God” to outcast widows who’ve known only rejection.

“The apostle James told us in his epistle that true religion is to care for orphans and widows in their distress,” Yohannan said. “The challenge facing the church around the world today is to not just read the Bible, but to do what is written in it.” {eoa}

Gospel for Asia GFA World, (gfa.org) is a leading faith-based mission agency, helping national workers bring vital assistance and spiritual hope to millions across Asia, especially to those who have yet to hear about the love of God. In GFA’s latest yearly report, this included more than 70,000 sponsored children, free medical camps conducted in more than 1,200 villages and remote communities, over 4,800 clean water wells drilled, over 12,000 water filters installed, income-generating Christmas gifts for more than 260,000 needy families and spiritual teaching available in 110 languages in 14 nations through radio ministry.