

## UN chief calls attention to invisible plight of mlns of widows, their children

UNITED NATIONS, June 23 (Xinhua) -- UN Secretary-General [Ban Ki-moon](#) on Tuesday reminded the world of the invisible plight of millions of widows and their children across the globe, many of whom have been robbed of their loved ones by conflict, saying "widows are particularly vulnerable" and "their age, income, ethnicity, disabilities and other factors can put women at greater risk of injustice."

In his message for the fifth International Widows' Day, which falls on June 23, the secretary-general said the International Day "is an opportunity to assert the rights of those whose bereavement is followed by exclusion, abuse or the loss of homes, livelihoods and social standing."

"Many are aging and may not have worked outside of the home," Ban said of the millions of widows across the world. "The death of their partner can leave them in precarious living conditions, particularly in areas of conflict, natural disaster and humanitarian crisis."

The UN General Assembly declared June 23 International Widows' Day in a bid to give special attention to the millions of widows and their children around the world who are "absent in statistics, unnoticed by researchers, neglected by national and local authorities and mostly overlooked by civil society organizations."

According to a UN fact sheet on the state of the world's widows, "vast numbers of women are widowed due to armed conflict." In some parts of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, it is reported that around 50 percent of women are widows, while there are an estimated three million widows in [Iraq](#) and more than 70,000 in Kabul, the capital of [Afghanistan](#).

In addition, it said that "in many countries, widowhood is stigmatized and seen as a source of shame. Widows are thought to be cursed in some cultures and are even associated with witchcraft. Such misconceptions can lead to widows being ostracized, abused and worse."

"In societies that view women as whole only when they are married, widows are often disregarded or stigmatized," Ban said. " Without the economic and social protection of their husbands, many widows are treated as financial burdens by their families."

"They may lose their rights to inheritance and property, or even be forced out of their communities," he said.

"On International Widows' Day, we reassert the equality of men and women," the secretary-general said, adding that "the United Nations is working on specific measures that can help widows."

"We must erase the social stigmatization and economic deprivation that confronts widows; eliminate their high risk of sexual abuse and exploitation; and remove the barriers to resources and economic opportunities that constrain their future," he said. "We also must advance widows' equal rights to inheritance, property, land and other assets."

"This will be an essential element in realizing our vision of a life of dignity for all," he said