






ALL AFRICA CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES (AACC) - CONFERENCE DES EGLISES DE TOUTE L'AFRIQUE (CETA)

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23rd June 2026

AACC MESSAGE COMMEMORATING THE INTERNATIONAL WIDOWS DAY

The Love of Christ Compels Us to Empower Widows for Justice, Dignity, and Sustainable Livelihoods – 2 Cor. 5:14.

The All Africa Conference of Churches joins the rest of the world in commemorating the International Widows Day on this 23rd day of June 2026. Today, we pause to acknowledge a reality that too many prefer to overlook: across Africa and the world, millions of women who have lost their spouses face not only grief but a cascade of injustices that compound their suffering. These include the loss of property, the denial of inheritance, forced and degrading widowhood rites, social stigma, economic exclusion, and silence from institutions that should protect them.

According to United Nations data, more than 258 million women are widowed worldwide. In Africa, their stories are too often stories of abandonment – abandoned by law, by custom, and sometimes even by the communities of faith that should be their refuge.

The AACC will not remain silent in the face of injustice. Our theme this year, “*The Love of Christ Compels Us*,” is not a gentle suggestion. This is a call for accountability. The Scriptures are unambiguous in their mandate to protect and uphold widows. The prophet Isaiah declared, “Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.” The Apostle James defined pure religion as caring for orphans and widows in distress. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the widow stands as a measure of a community’s justice or its failure.

As churches, we have an extraordinary reach across this continent. Our congregations are present in cities and the most remote rural communities. Our pastors, bishops, women’s fellowships, and mothers’ unions are trusted voices in households and villages throughout Africa. That reach gives us not only opportunity, but also responsibility. We must use our moral authority, community presence, and prophetic voice to stand unequivocally on the side of the widow.

We must be honest about what widows face in Africa. Property grabbing by in-laws following the death of a spouse remains rampant in many communities, rendering women and their children destitute. Harmful widowhood rites including forced mourning seclusion, sexual cleansing rituals, and restrictions on movement and dress violate the

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bodily autonomy and dignity of women under the guise of culture. Inheritance laws, where they exist, are frequently not enforced in practice.

Widows who speak out often face further ostracization. These are not distant issues. They occur in the communities where our member churches minister. This means that they are, in part, our responsibility to address.

On this day, we call upon our member churches and ecumenical partners to:

- Actively preach and teach against harmful widowhood practices and property grabbing from church pulpits and in faith formation programmes.
- Establish or strengthen pastoral care structures that provide practical, legal, psychosocial, and spiritual support to widows in congregations.
- Advocate to their national governments for the enforcement of laws protecting widows' inheritance and property rights, and where such laws are inadequate, demand reform.
- Partner with widows' associations and women's organizations to co-create solutions grounded in the lived experiences of widows.

As we mark International Widows Day, let us resolve that our commemoration will not end with words. This must translate into policy advocacy, pastoral action, community accountability, and unwavering solidarity. Let the love of Christ that compels us be visible not only in our declarations, but in the changed lives of widows across Africa.

On behalf of the All Africa Conference of Churches, I reaffirm our commitment to walking alongside widows in advocacy, in prayer, and in action until justice is not the exception, but the norm.

Yours in Faith and Service,
Rev. Dr. Fidon Mwombeki
General Secretary
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