

## HOPE FOR LIFE INITIATIVE AND NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS COMMEMORATE INTERNATIONAL WIDOWS DAY

**The International Widows Day** is celebrated every year on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, as established by the United Nations in 2010 to draw attention to the plight of widows around the world, particularly in developing countries where they may face poverty, social stigmatization, discrimination, and violence. This year's event, with the theme: **Invisible Women, Invisible Problems**, was marked on Monday, 14 July 2025, with a public lecture organized by Hope for Life Initiative in collaboration with the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA). Three seasoned speakers spoke to the hundreds of widows in attendance on varying issues that affect them.



Dr Esther Idowu, a Research Fellow at the Institute gave a message of hope, inspiration and encouragement with the title of her paper being, **Masoretinu: From Shadows to Strength**. She spoke at length about the realities of widows and their challenges. Having highlighted their struggles, she suggested means by which they could reclaim their visibility, strength and purpose. She also discussed areas in which there could be progressive change or a call for action spanning individuals (by canvassing for women-to-women support), the communities, civil society and the government. She hailed Hope for Life Initiative for their efforts at giving a voice and a platform to this vulnerable set of women in the society and also commended the

Institute for their consistent collaboration in noble ventures. Dr Idowu concluded by commending the Lagos State Government for their role but tasked them to do more.

The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Mr Emmanuel Audu, ably represented by Ms. Bukola Idowu, rendered goodwill messages and expressed the ministry's interest in helping willing widows by giving them free training in agriculture and related vocations. She emphasized the government's efforts in their contribution to ease the burden of women and gave examples of packages that are specially designed for women.

Ms. Blessing Etsu, a bone marrow transplant nurse at the Sickie Cell Foundation, Lagos, who represented Dr. Annette Akinsete, the National Director/CEO, Sickie Cell Foundation, Lagos, traced the physiological and biological trajectories of womanhood and the pain and other

unpleasant experiences that come with it. She drove home her points by sharing real life experiences of widows while giving lifting words on how widows could live better and fulfilling lives. In the words of Dr. Akinsete, "Let us not simply help women to survive, let us help them to thrive."

Some of the attendees used the interactive session to share their gory stories and wanted to know what

opportunities were available for them and their children from the government and other channels. Ms. Bukola Idowu reiterated the opportunities offered by the Ministry of Agriculture, specifically targeted at women, especially those interested in farming. Ms. Etsu explained that some seeming physical pains that widows go through could be psychological and emotional because of grief and the healing process. She advised them to always speak up, consult a doctor and never discount any unusual feeling they experience. Dr Idowu mentioned internship opportunities for qualified children of widows and also encouraged them to take up vocational training where available, while encouraging their children to do the same because of the leverage it provides in the labour world.



Ms. Kendi Aig-Imoru, the Founder/Visioner, Hope for Life Initiative, and Mrs. Helen Onwuasor, representing the Institute, gave their votes of thanks. Some regular attendees at such a forum got the opportunity to share their experiences/testimonies while everyone of them were treated to some goody bags. They dispersed after a series of photographs, all feeling hopeful for a brighter and more visible tomorrow.

**Compiled by NIIA Program Reporting Committee**