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****MODERN ADVOCACY HUMANITARIAN
SOCIAL AND REHABILITATION
ASSOCIATION****

Global Aid and Well-being Associates

MAHSRA

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**A Speech Presented by the Chief Executive Officer of Modern Advocacy Humanitarian Social
and Rehabilitation Association – MAHSRA**

On the Occasion of the Official Public Presentation and Ceremony of,

The Widowhood Rites to Rights Initiative for Esu, Weh and Wum,

His Excellency, the Governor of North West Region;
His Excellency, the Canadian High Commissioner to Cameroon;
Your Royal Highnesses, the Fons of Esu, Weh and Wum;
The Entire Aghem People's Community;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

I begin by acknowledging and giving thanks to the Almighty God for making it possible for us to gather here today in order to institutionalise a new process which will stampede a community rights-based pattern that strives at eliminating the silent suffering ignorantly faced by thousands of women within the communities of Esu, Weh, Wum and beyond.

Primarily, the widowhood rites to rights initiative aims at investigating, analysing and developing the most effective mechanisms to address the human rights of women within a complex framework of gender violence assessments that are both psychological and physical. The initiative has an overall dimension to foster the will of the Cameroonian government as duly transcribed through its ratification of several international conventions such as: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Declaration on the Right to Development. (Detailed in the Monographs distributed). With due accreditation as a legally registered entity both nationally and internationally and with a consultative status to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, MAHSRA's goals, though with very limited material resources and yet with huge global intellectual influence, have been strategized for results orientated action platforms wherein high level policy reaching objectives are transpired through experience-based interactive sessions between the targeted beneficiary victims and the responsibilities of their governing authorities. As such, for the sake of increase or rapid sustainable development goals, MAHSRA aspires to interweave the well-being priorities of the



majority vulnerable populations who are women in rural setups and the scope of their contributions towards poverty eradication and rural development as a whole.

Based on MAHSRA's field assessments, especially within the presently targeted communities of Esu, Weh and Wum, our estimates have portrayed a significant 60% decrease in the growth and development rates of these communities because, over half of the populations made up of widows and their orphaned children are overtly or tacitly denied due resources that should have enhanced their well-being and growth thus subjecting them to abject poverty. The potential rural development force that could be extracted from these demoralized and psychologically defeated set of persons are considered lost to their sorrow due to the egoistic grasps of certain community individuals acting under the armpits of unverified traditional customs.

From specific exemplary cases and general traditional practices within the targeted initiative zones, both matrilineal and patrilineal widowhood inheritance rites are noticed. Within this perspective, it is worth noting that, unless stated otherwise by due legal texts or other legally instituted hereditary directions, the succeeding wife or widow of a late man and her children are the sold custodians of his property left behind. Besides the hereditary factor to widowhood which inflicts chronic poverty on the surviving spouse and the children, there is also a psychological factor that strongly degrades the health and social stability of the widow and her orphaned children. Some of these factors may include:

- Compelling her to undergo degrading human dignity practices with regard to the pending burial rites of her late husband's corpse;
- Compelling her to wear only a specific dress for several months and to feed through the use of a single plate, cup, and spoon;
- Segregating her with identifying elements on her body and prohibiting her from participating in public or external activities from home, including any religious or other social gatherings for long periods;
- Restricting her from commercial activities for a considerable timeframe;
- Compelling her to cohabit and share intimacy with the late husband's brother which she may already consider as her own brother;
- Allowing her to fend alone for her orphaned children; and many more...

All the mentioned points above which compel the widow to perform tasks that degrade her human dignity and freedoms are illegal and cannot to be tolerated within the framework of any local custom. These compelling acts on the widows, when tolerated, do not only deny, undermine or make a mockery on our national legal institutions but as well, they perpetrate a systematic injustice against the rapid development process of the concerned localities. The rural woman is a vital rural development tool, if she is psychologically unstable, such a locality will lose the tool and thus have



its development process impeded and so, increase poverty and hunger on people. The rural woman is very important and thus she deserves:

Better Treatment, Better Care and Better Community Support.

I believe our learned traditional rulers of Esu, Weh and Wum have truly assessed and understood the plea of their women subjects and widows who fear to see the type of torture they have been through reoccur to their daughters. This, I suppose, should be the reason why they have combined efforts with MAHSRA to make sure that all activities planned to enlighten their people are done with their consent and blessings.

On behalf of all the widows I have worked with, I say, Thank You “M’behs”.

The Gratitude is also extended to the Canadian High Commission to Cameroon for their instrumental support in fostering the realisation of the widowhood rites to rights initiative.

In order to reassure you of MAHSRA’s commitment in bringing peace and unity within families rather than separation and insubordination, I give you my word that the various associations of leader widows formed within your localities are duly trained to harness calm and effective communication skills on family solidarity and conflict resolution.

As well, in as much as traditional cultural diversities form the richness of a people such as those of Esu, Weh and the Aghem community, ‘such richness’ conceptions should not be accompanied by sorrow and tears of the bearers or owners but rather, should be the sources of joy and pride to every member of the community. This is the reason why MAHSRA’s intervention within this domain is not to destroy or change any traditional custom but rather, to form a human rights merger dynamics which should enhance the well-being and development rights of all members within the community. Barbaric traditional rites practices are neither tolerated within national laws nor within ratified international conventions.

We also, acknowledge and thank the presence of the Government Divisional Officers and Security Personnel of Menchum herein present and duly hope that they will work in close collaboration with community leaders to see that the rights and well-being of the widows are fully respected and enforced.

Lastly, May the Peace and Equality for Mutual and Sustainable Human Development and Growth that has gathered all of us here today and May the plight of all widows see a new dawn of positive and fruitful aspirations.

Long live the Localities of Esu, Weh and Wum
Long live the Canadian Local Development Initiatives
Long Live MAHSRA
Long live My Beloveth Republic - Cameroon

