



WUCWO DAY 2021

LET US ELIMINATE
DISCRIMINATION AND
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

PRAYER SERVICE FOR THE 2021 WORLD UNION OF CATHOLIC WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS (WUCWO) DAY

Prepared by the North American Region

Needed:

- A quiet space with an altar or table
- A candle for each participant that can be safely placed on the table or altar and a means to light the candle
- Paper and pen for each participant

CALLED TO SHINE

INTRODUCTION:

We are all vessels of light, illumined by Christ, called to shine His light on this world. As we enter the third year of this mandate, we examine and pray for our third resolution:

LET US ELIMINATE DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In accordance with the whole Magisterium and in particular with *Evangelii Gaudium* Apostolic Exhortation (212) WUCWO will promote concrete actions for the elimination of discrimination and violence against women and the family by:

- Promoting among its member organizations education in the integral formation of men and women in the recognition of and respect for their equal and complementary dignity.
- Promoting sympathetic recognition and care for victims in families, schools, the Church, the media, local authorities, and related organizations, whether denominational or not.

There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures, and communities: Violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable.
(Ban Ki-moon, Eighth Secretary General of the United Nations)

OPENING PRAYER:

We gather to speak with You, Father, about a deep injustice experienced around the world in different forms but all based on one terrible historical premise.

We come to speak with You about the sin of discrimination and violence against over one-half of the human race, beings that You so lovingly created in Your image.

We come to speak with You about ending the horrors many women endure regardless of their race, nationality, or social class but suffer, simply because they are women.

We come to speak with You about justice, about mercy, about dignity, and about the right of each woman to exist, to have a voice, to have respect, to have freedom, to have the opportunity to achieve all that You created her to be.

We gather to contemplate, pray, and ask for strength and courage to face and combat this evil. Lead us to help make a world where women are valued and respected without exception. A world where the contributions and complementarity of men and women are accepted as equal and accorded the same status.

We come to speak with You humbly but with urgency and tender worry filling our hearts. We ask Your divine help that we may have the light of Your grace to shine with wisdom, knowledge, opportunity, and strength to accomplish this task with the guidance of our mother, Our Lady, Queen of Peace. Amen.

FIRST READING:

Psalm 82: 3-4

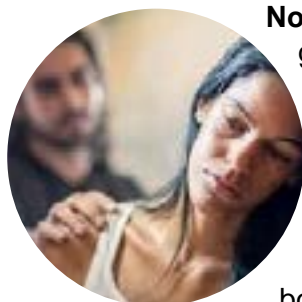
Defend the poor and fatherless
Do justice to the afflicted and needy.
Deliver the poor and needy;
Free them from the hand of the wicked.

TESTIMONIES

(Have each of the following stories read by different women):



Tikirit: I do not know how I got to be a wahaya (slave) in Niger. **I know I became one when I was only 10 years old** and lived as one for 15 years. A man called Amola owned me and we lived in his family village. I was his only slave and my clothes set me apart from his four legal wives. They dressed decently, while my clothes barely covered me. He used to come to me at night in secret for sex. My workload was heavy. I had to fetch water for all the family. I had to fetch water for over 100 cattle. I had to hull and pound millet and sorghum for food. I had to provide firewood for the family. I often had to prepare everything for and during large community gatherings for up to 40 people that took place in the fields during the rainy season. I had to wash up, keep the courtyard clean, prepare all the beds and look after the children. These were my tasks until Amola died and I had to leave. I was found by the good Sisters and now, I live in another country in peace, holding the Christian God in my heart.



Noel: When you're choosing between two bad options, it's not really a choice. I grew up in Chile with an abusive and alcoholic father. When I got pregnant, he kicked me out and from then on, I was on my own. **I was just 15 years old at that time.** I can still remember that feeling of being cold and wet and alone on the streets. Even today when it rains, it sort of takes me back. People will say "You were so young when this started." That's one of the least unusual things about my story. Most of us were that young when we started. You don't feel young for very long. I didn't think I'd met a pimp. I thought I had a boyfriend. I thought I had gotten so lucky that he had found me. I thought he could help me get out of poverty. The more vulnerable you are, the more powerful they become. Pimps give girls the things that are missing in their lives: Love, self-esteem, belonging. It's a lie, but at first it doesn't feel like a lie. Especially if you are homeless and on your own. He had a

motel room and I was no longer homeless. Then, he took my ID and told me he'd kill me if I didn't do what he said. I tried to run away, but he kept finding me. I was a teenager, isolated from my friends, alone. And he knew it. It's bad when they threaten you, and worse when they threaten what you love. He said that he would kill my son if I didn't prostitute myself and I believed him. I still do believe that. You become a different person when you've been in that life. You start to believe that this is where you belong. You don't realize how much damage it is doing to you emotionally and spiritually, not right away. It hits you later. Was I beaten? Yes. Was I raped? Yes. But through the grace of God and a kind man to whom I was given as a gift one night, I am still here. I survived and learned to live in freedom and true love. My rescuer brought me to his home in the US, married me, loves me, and we live happily with our family. I am blessed.



Naomi: I was a sophomore in college. I fell in love with a wonder guy, my prince charming. It was the perfect wedding, perfect life, perfect relationship - until one day I felt his hand on my face. He said, "Bitch, if you had kept your mouth closed, it wouldn't have happened." From that moment, my life was turned upside down. I was mentally, emotionally, physically, financially, and sexually abused. He degraded me, he talked about me being overweight, and he stripped me of all of my inner strength. I began to question my self-worth, self-confidence, and my true purpose in life. I thought of committing suicide many times. It was a way out for me. I told no one in the beginning. I was too embarrassed and ashamed to share what I was going through - my family and

friends adored him. He isolated me from my support system, those who loved and cared for me dearly. Lines of communication with family and friends were limited. He monitored my every move. Change never came. One day he put his hands around my neck and began strangling me. It was like he was possessed. He said to me, "I will kill you if you ever leave." I saw myself dying at his hands. Then, he bought a gun and kept it loaded. I went to bed that night and prayed quietly and with a purpose and despair so deep it was as if I was tearing apart. When I was finished, exhausted, totally spent, I clearly heard a soft-spoken voice like a whisper in my ear -and I knew it was voice of God. The next morning, I woke up and the voice said to me, "Today's the day you leave." I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I told my husband I was leaving for work and gave him a kiss goodbye. I hid behind a building across from our apartment building and when I saw him get into his car, I returned to the apartment to gather my things. I never went back and I found help from *Catholic Charities*.

REFLECTION:

We have just heard stories of women who were trafficked for work, for sex, and a story from a woman who endured domestic violence. There are even worse stories out there, most without happy endings, and many more ways that women are discriminated against and who suffer violence. We know of violence in the forms of child marriage, female genital mutilation, femicide by selective abortion pre-birth and murder of girl babies who have taken their first breath in this world, lack of legal status, killing for not bringing enough dowry to a marriage, advantage taken of the disabled, prejudice against refugees and migrants, the suffering of women and girls in war, and the more insidious and less visible forms of discrimination that hold women and girls as second-class members of the human race, denying them basic human and legal rights, education, work, proper healthcare, dignity, and respect. Training girls to "stay in their place" and boys to think that men are superior to women. Statistics abound noting the estimated numbers of women and girls subjected to discrimination and violence and we are justly outraged and saddened. But then do we simply return to going about our daily lives, perhaps praying for them -when we remember to do so? As Catholic women, sisters to all women, we need to do more!

Today, we pray but realize that we also have a need, as Catholic women, to shine the light of Christ for our sisters who are enslaved in prejudice and violence by advocating and acting to help them whenever we can. We need to become educated about these injustices and we need to educate

others. We need to pray and we need to advocate and act so that there are no more stories like these. These stories may touch our hearts, but we need them to inflame our souls with a passion that will bring an end to this maltreatment and to these prejudices. In Genesis we read that God created man in His own image; male and female He created them! We are all, female and male, God's beloved creation and most especially, of all Creation, we are privileged to know Him. With privilege comes great responsibility. Think about how you will accept your responsibility for your sisters who suffer; for we are, indeed, all sisters, united with each other no matter our country, culture, or language. We are all one, united in our common feminine identification, our bond of sisterhood, our bond as daughters of God. As Catholic women we unite in our prayer and in our action, realizing that our hands and voices joined together, can achieve great change. We can overcome the blindness of traditions that hold back the potential of all women to be all that God intends for them. We can do this when we realize that we are all one beautiful, powerful, compassionate, and strong band of sisters standing together, shining the light of Christ in this world.

One Woman: A Hymn for UN Women

<https://youtu.be/Dnq2QeCvwpw>

In Kigali, she wakes up,
 She makes a choice,
 In Hanoi, Natal, Ramallah.
 In Tangier, she takes a breath,
 Lifts up her voice,
 In Lahore, La Paz, Kampala.
 Though she's half a world away
 Something in me wants to say ...
 We are One Woman,
 You cry and I hear you.
 We are One Woman,
 You hurt, and I hurt, too.
 We are One Woman,
 Your hopes are mine.
 We shall shine.
 In Juarez she speaks the truth,
 She reaches out,
 Then teaches others how to.
 In Jaipur, she gives her name,
 She lives without shame
 In Manila, Salta, Embu.
 Though we're different as can be,
 We're connected, she with me

We are One Woman,
 Your courage keeps me strong.
 We are One Woman,
 You sing, I sing along.
 We are One Woman,
 Your dreams are mine.
 And we shall shine.
 We shall shine.
 And one man, he hears her voice.
 And one man, he fights her fight.
 Day by day, he lets go the old ways,
 One Woman at a time.
 Though she's half a world away,
 Something in me wants to say.
 We are One Woman,
 Your victories lift us all.
 We are One Woman,
 You rise and I stand tall.
 We are One Woman,
 Your world is mine
 And we shall shine.
 Shine, shine, shine.
 We shall shine Shine, shine, shine.

So, our task now is to ask how shall we, as Catholic women of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations, shine as we pray and care for our sisters who suffer?

MEDITATION:

Please take some time now to think and note in silence how WUCWO can help make a world where all women and girls can shine (paper and pens provided).

SECOND READING:

Romans 12:10.15

Love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor.
Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

REFLECTION:

Sharing of ideas of how WUCWO can help make a world where all women and girls can shine.

MEDITATION:

Our World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations, a union representing eight million of our Catholic sisters with representation at important world bodies and Vatican recognition as the only Public International Association of the Faithful made up of women, provides us an important platform today on 2021 WUCWO Day and every day to unite our efforts to pray, educate, advocate, and act for our sisters around the world who suffer from prejudice and violence. This work remains true to our mission and echoes all the good that WUCWO has promoted over the last 111 years. Today, we meet to pray and so let us now join our voices as we ask God to hear our petitions for those sisters who suffer throughout our world.

PRAYERS OF PETITION:

Our response (R/) is: Lord, hear our prayer

Leader: Loving Father, we gather to thank you for the gift of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations as we continue our presence and our work. May WUCWO continue to be a beacon that shines with divine light to give hope and comfort to all our sisters **R/**

Leader: May all women affected by violence find the courage to break their silence, find protection, and receive healing and justice **R/**

Leader: Grant us wisdom that enables us to recognize women affected by violence and to know what to do for them **R/**

Leader: Give us courage and strength to work against the evils of violence and prejudice, to educate all girls and boys to know and recognize the dignity of women as daughters of the Father, to ensure safety and justice for those who suffer, and to create change so that violence and prejudice against women exist no more **R/**

Leader: Give us the grace to embrace our sisters who have suffered, providing recognition and care for victims in families, schools, the Church, the media, local authorities, and related organizations, whether denominational or not **R/**

Leader: We pray that those who inflict suffering on women and girls in any way may receive the grace to change and repent their ways **R/**

Leader: We pray for those women and girls who have died from the effect of their suffering and ask that You receive them into Your tender Mercy **R/**

Leader: Please let us achieve a world free from selfish complacency where all persons are valued equally with dignity and respect **R/**

Leader: We ask for recognition of the gift and responsibility to shine the light of Your love to the world, especially to women and families who suffer **R/**

Leader: We ask these things with the intercession of Mary, Queen of Peace, a woman who endured piecing sorrow and understands the hearts of her suffering sisters, through her Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen

Together, let us recite the words that Jesus gave us:

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen

This year of Working to Eliminate Prejudice and Violence against Women causes us to think especially of Our Lady, our Queen of Peace. We pray that she will ask her divine Son to bestow the graces needed to advocate and act for justice for the oppressed, to end the evils of prejudice and violence, and to restore the central place of the family as the core of Society. We ask these things confident in her great maternal love and feel the warmth of her embrace as we pray:

PRAYER TO MARY, QUEEN OF PEACE, PATRONESS OF WUCWO

*O Loving God, your Son, Jesus, came into this world to do
your will and leave us His peace.*

*Through the intercession and example of our Blessed Mother Mary,
Queen of Peace, grant us the wisdom and humility to reflect that peace to the world.
Inspire our thoughts, words and deeds to bear witness to your presence in our hearts.*

*May your Holy Spirit fill us with every grace and blessing so that we may
pursue what leads to peace for all humanity. Amen.*

(Karen Hurley, WUCWO President-General 2006-2010)

CONCLUSION:

We conclude our Prayer Service, cognizant that we go forth to pray and work for a world in which all of our brothers and sisters will live lives of dignity and equality, free from all forms of prejudice and violence, with souls filled with the love that our Saviour gives.

Those who instruct many unto justice will shine as stars for all eternity (Daniel 12:3).

Lord, grant they we may shine, carrying the light of Your justice, as we pray, work and speak for those with no voice or freedom. Let us be Your hands as we reach out to them and shape a world where women and families are valued and loved. Please grant that, in doing so, we may gain the shining loving light of eternity with you. Amen.

Each person lights her candle as she is moved to do so and leaves it burning on the altar or table so there is a collection of glowing light as we sing: <https://youtu.be/vq1eBfQ9-20>

CLOSING HYMN: *Christ Be Our Light (Bernadette Farrell)*

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to You.
Make us Your own, Your holy people,
Light for the world to see.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine
through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in Your church
gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us Your living voice.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine
through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in Your church
gathered today.

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us Your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine
through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in Your church

gathered today.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us Your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine
through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in Your church
gathered today.

Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making Your kingdom come.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine
through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in Your church
gathered today.