



CHANGE THE FATE OF GIRLS IT'S IN OUR HANDS

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a unique crime of institutionalized violence and savagery committed against girls and women. It must be prosecuted and stopped – now.



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This is the goal of the United Nations 67th General Assembly adoption of the Resolution, 'Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation' which saw consensus and passage on 20 December, 2012 by 193 UN member States. Amnesty International calls FGM a grotesque practice. The UN is unequivocal, calling it "an irreparable, irreversible abuse that impacts negatively on the human rights of women and girls".

Burkina Faso's UN Ambassador Der Kogda said to the General Assembly "This practice, justified, under false pretences by supposed cultural and religious tenets, remains a taboo subject, misunderstood and misinterpreted in several societies".

As a moral guide to future progress the United Nations helps to break the silence. Zero Tolerance Day, 6 February, 2013, is in sight, and the Resolution wins, in part, in its adoption of correct and powerful language.

The use, finally, of the term, Female Genital Mutilation, is fundamental to being able to combat this traditionally, and previously hidden, sly and secretive social norm. FGM is depicted as a heinous brutality, just as all violence against women and girls must be similarly regarded. The UN Resolution calls the crime for what it is. No longer permitting fudging language to sanitize institutional crimes.

The UN believes that upwards of 130 million girls and women have suffered the practice

of FGM. The World Health Organization estimates that 6,000 girls are mutilated every day, with three million girls at risk each year. This information is collated from 28 African countries. Of those countries, 9 of them still do not have anti-FGM laws on their books.

But now we also understand that FGM is regularly practised outside the African continent. The UN tells us. Perhaps not so visible in this regard, are, Egypt, Yemen, Bedouin, Iraq, Malaysia, Indonesia, Chile and parts of South America, where we've learned FGM is the practice of particular ethnic groups. Surprisingly, FGM, as a migrating crime, is performed in the West. The West too is culpable. Europe, England, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada are now under UN watch. The UN positions are very clear. FGM is a crime against women and girls wherever it occurs.

Some immigrant communities in the West have sought to circumvent national laws prohibiting FGM and have taken their girls and women on journeys to countries allowing FGM, with the sole purpose of fulfilling an objective of genitally mutilating young female family members. The transportation of girls and women requires the continued focus of anti FGM activists. The criminalization of this movement of women and girls must be enacted and accepted between all countries.

Of note, The 'Girls Protection Act' in the US Senate, in 2011, led to the 'Transport for Female Genital Mutilation' bill, effectively passing as an amendment to the National Defence Authorization Act (Fiscal Year 2013). It was signed in January 2013 by President Obama. The present Canadian Government needs to do the same, very quickly, together with all countries finding evidence of FGM practice within their borders.

With the UN Resolution now in place, all countries are morally required to draft and then enforce legislation and policies to pro-

hibit and prevent the practice and to end apology and immunity for perpetrators of FGM, who are now clear violators of the UN Resolution.

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Equally, medical doctors seeking to sanitize and render more 'safe' the practice of FGM must also change their ways or face the penalty of prosecution. It is necessary to consider how FGM practitioners can be redirected in the future. What forms of alternative employment can be made available for 'cutters' or 'excisors'? In Kenya, on the Ugandan border, former excisors have been given sheep to tend along with redirection/re-education training through Setat Women's Organization, a groundbreaking NGO of the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices.

Funding should according to the wording of the Resolution, establish protective legislation that contributes to the development of positive social norms including the empowerment of women community-focused initiatives. Controlling a girl or women's sexuality must stop as a cultural norm. Myths that it enhances fertility must be corrected and erased. Further, as Aayan Hirsi Ali of the Aha Foundation points out, we have to look at forced marriage as a driver of FGM practices.

Further challenges are faced in meeting another key topic of the Resolution: support for the victims. It is critical to support the training of people in the field to understand and provide the treatment that will be necessary to counter the psycho-sexual trauma of FGM abuse. The Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices and the First

Ladies of Burkina Faso and Benin, coupled with the support of Western leaders in the EU, the US and Canada led the progress. The Ban FGM Now Campaign, No Peace Without Justice, Euronet-FGM and, more recently, The Global Alliance against FGM, have been noted for developing tracking

systems tracing where FGM is occurring and what actions are being taken to eliminate the practice. Next step: To have organizations participate as part of the Donor Working Group so that people and entities can direct their donations to the cause in a systematic and effective way. ■

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