Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a violation of human rights and a form of violence against women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child call on States Parties to eliminate harmful traditional practices, and the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa explicitly calls on states to prohibit and condemn FGM through awareness creation and enacting of Law in order to eliminate the practice. The Gambia, has ratified these treaties over the years members of relevant ministries, parliamentarians and civil society actors have dedicated attention to discussion on measures to be undertaken to fulfill these obligations.

To further these developments, the Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (GAMCOTRAP) and the international NGO No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ) will organize a National Parliamentary Workshop on 29 September 2009 bringing together Members of the Parliament of The Gambia with representatives from the judiciary, civil society and relevant government ministries to mobilize political and parliamentary will towards the development of legislation banning FGM.

Effective national legislation is a vital component of efforts to accelerate the elimination of FGM. The enactment and implementation of legislation against FGM demonstrates a formal, explicit and lasting commitment by public authorities to turning the tide of social norms that perpetuate the practice and are detrimental to women and girls. Furthermore, the law can also provide the legal tools to legitimize and facilitate the work of anti-FGM activists and women's rights groups, and to protect women and girls willing to challenge the social convention by refusing to undergo FGM. Conversely, an absence of legislation contributes to the perception of FGM as “acceptable” and weakens the legitimacy and impact of anti-FGM advocates.

The Gambia has ratified almost all the international and regional conventions/instruments regarding women and children’s rights thus showing the political will and commitment to advance the strategic interest and human rights of women and girl-children. The Gambia is a signatory to the following conventions:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
The Constitution of the Gambia has given formal equality to women and there are various policy documents that have relevant provisions and commitments to promote women’s rights. Thus the environment is positive for reform of laws or enactment of new laws to protect women and girl-children from harmful traditional practices that are inimical to their health and well-being. Currently, the Children’s Act is in place but not known by many actors in the Gambia. There is a call by those who are responsible for the execution of justice to gain knowledge about FGM and to be empowered with the right information to enable them protect women and children.

The National Parliamentary Workshop will be a day-long knowledge-sharing session, intended to address the progress towards enactment of national legislation, and to encourage wider knowledge and discussion among all the relevant stakeholders.

Participants will include Parliamentarians, members of the judiciary, of law enforcement agencies and of civil society organizations working toward the elimination of FGM. The discussion will aim to encompass all aspects of a potential law, from strategies for its development to plans for outreach, focusing on the elements which the law must include to be effective and to help ensure applicability once enacted. The workshop will include an examination of the legal tools utilized in the fight against FGM in other countries, including the process of developing laws, their effectiveness, and the obstacles that have been encountered in implementing them.

National and international NGOs working in the country as well as the UN Agencies charged with combating FGM will be encouraged to participate in and support the workshop.

**About the organizers:**

Founded in 1984, The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children is one of the leading Women’s Rights NGOs in The Gambia, focusing its work on the rights of women and children with a particular campaign against harmful traditional practices affecting the health of women and children, especially FGM. Among the activities undertaken has been the organization of training workshops on the rights of the child and on sexual and reproductive health for the members of the National Assembly in 2005, as well as other advocacy aimed at the full ratification of the various relevant international human rights treaties and their subsequent implementation.

The No Peace Without Justice Female Genital Mutilation Programme works towards a political, legal and social environment that challenges attitudes and behaviors on FGM and promotes its elimination, in the context of the promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls. Since 2000, NPWJ has organized numerous conferences, seminars and workshops aimed at raising awareness and stimulating political commitment within institutions and among decision makers and political, community and opinion leaders able to influence and promote policy-making and legislation, fostering trans-national and regional cooperation and coordination, as positive and lasting tools for social change, in order to help to turn the tide of social norms against FGM.
Objectives of the Workshop

- To bring together and sensitize parliamentarians, the judiciary, law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations to discuss the human rights of women and the effects of FGM on women and children's sexual and reproductive health rights
- To share knowledge and strategies with other countries that have legislated against FGM
- To work towards legislation banning FGM

Strategy

The Coalition Against FGM and the Child Protection Alliance in the Gambia will work together with NPWJ to fulfill this mission.

There will be collaboration with The Government of The Gambia, through the Office of the Vice President and Secretary of State for Women's Affairs.

The Parliamentary Committee on Women and Children will also be engaged.