“Engaging Parliament towards Ending Female Genital Mutilation”
National Parliamentary Workshop
Banjul, The Gambia
29 October 2009

- REPORT -

OPENING CEREMONY

- Mr. Sidia Jatta, Member of Parliament and chairman of the Board of Directors of GAMCOTRAP, Chairs the Workshop. After welcoming the guests and participants to the workshop, he says “this is an exchange of ideas to expand the dialogue on important matters that affect the life of the country”. The ultimate aim of the work undertaken in the course of the day is to save the lives of women and children.

- The Islamic Supreme Council representative, Imam Al-Haji Baba Drameh, leads the Muslim prayers. Mrs. Bryant of GAMESCO leads the Christian prayers.

- Dr. Isatou Touray, Executive Director of GAMCOTRAP, welcomes all participants and remarks on the important steps achieved in partnership with the Government and the Parliament to protect the rights of women and children, taking into consideration the best interest of the child.

She points out that effective national legislation is a vital component to accelerate the efforts towards the elimination of FGM. It shows an explicit and lasting commitment by the authorities and it provides the legal tools for anti-FGM activists and for women who do not want to undertake the practice.

Since The Gambia has ratified almost all the Conventions regarding the rights of women and children, and the Constitution gives equality to women and men, the environment is therefore positive to enact a law against FGM.

This one-day long workshop is intended to be a knowledge-sharing session to work towards the enactment of such legislation.

FGM, once a jealously guarded secret and wrongly associated to religion, is no longer a taboo subject.
Dr. Isatou Touray briefly illustrates the right-based-approach trainings carried out by GAMCOTRAP in the field with the support of Save the Children-Sweden.

She highlights the importance of working closely with the legislators to move the agenda towards the enactment of a law banning FGM.

In May 2007, after a GACOTRAP outreach campaign, 18 circumcisers and 62 communities renounced the practice of FGM. A second public declaration by 60 circumcisers and 315 communities will be held on December 2009. These public declarations are highly important as circumcisers are points of reference at the community level.

She thanks all the participants, the parliamentarians, the government, the Ministry representatives, NPWJ, the Italian Government, UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Programme, UNOPS, OSI, and UNDP for their support.

● Alvilda Jablonko, NPWJ FGM Program Coordinator, thanks participants for the commitment shown to this issue and notes the inspiration provided by Dr. Isatou Touray, whose dedication to the cause of ending FGM in The Gambia, and whose leadership are truly rare, and deserve a great deal of recognition.

Ms. Jablonko illustrates the work done by NPWJ on FGM, since the Conference held in Cairo in 2003. She remarks that international treaties such as the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa are an encouragement to governments to take the steps towards protecting all of their citizens. Even after ratification the harmful practices sometimes continue and this workshop is intended to move the process a step closer towards the implementation of the commitment undertaken upon ratification, that is the enactment and then implementation of effective national legislation.

Furthermore, a lack of robust and effective FGM legislation in each of the States within a sub-region diminishes and undermines efforts in all States to eliminate the practice and perpetuates the disempowerment of women and of girls at risk of FGM. Therefore, neighbouring states should cooperate at both the governmental and civil society level.

There should be exchange of information and dialogue among civil society, parliament, government and stakeholders within the international community.

She expresses her willingness to work together with the stakeholders also when she will be back in Brussels.

● Mrs. Ramou Cole-Ceesay, Representative of the Ministry of Health says she is honoured to accept the invitation on the behalf of the Minister of Health.
She asserts that the Government of The Gambia is committed to the promotion of women’s health and in particular their sexual and reproductive health. It has developed policies to incorporate the components of the International Conference on Population and Development which also includes harmful traditional practices affecting maternal and child health such as Female Genital Mutilation, Early Marriages, and nutritional taboos, amongst others.

Current relevant statistics in The Gambia are as follows: maternal mortality rate stands at 554 per 100,000 live births compared to 730 per 100,000 live births in 2001. The target for 2015 is to reduce the rate significantly to 260 per 100,000 live births.

She illustrates the objectives of the workshop:

- to bring together parliamentarians, officials, and civil-society organisations to work towards a law banning FGM in The Gambia
- to discuss the effects of the continued practice of FGM on the human rights of women and children, as well as on sexual and reproductive health
- to share strategies and best practices

She says: “The Gambia has signed and ratified a number of international conventions and declarations to protect women and children, such as CEDAW, CRC, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Efforts to raise the consciousness of the people include training with communities, professional groups as well as policy makers and the legislature. (..) Article 5 of Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) calls for enacting legislation; It is expected that this training workshop will prepare our legislators to take the necessary steps to answer to this call to enact an effective law against FGM”.

She commends the activities lead by GAMCOTRAP, especially the fact that in May 2007, eighteen FGM practitioners and sixty-three communities from the Upper River Region, Central River Region and parts of the Lower River Region made the first public declaration against FGM at the “Dropping of the Knife” celebration held at the Independence Stadium. This celebration increased the visibility of the campaign against FGM and other harmful traditional practices affecting the health and wellbeing of women and girls in particular. All these successes are due to the fact that when people are aware, they can take responsibility to protect girls and women.

Today marks another step in the advocacy to protect women and girls from FGM. It is another giant step to engage the new parliamentarians in the process to be able to make informed decisions to protect women and girls from FGM and early marriage.

At the end of her presentation, she officially declared the National Workshop open.

- The Ebo Town Kanyeleng Group entertains the audience with a song detailing the harm inflicted by FGM and calling on those present to take action against the practice.

**SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF FGM IN THE GAMBIA**
Dr. Isatou Touray provides an analytical overview of FGM in The Gambia. She opens by appealing to the MPs to be aware of the commitments undertaken by The Gambia in ratifying international and regional human rights instruments. She recalls the achievements of the 2007 campaign that lead to an important declaration by chiefs of the western region which called for a law to be enacted and recommended that GAMCOTRAP work with MPs towards achieving this goal. Affected women themselves, as well as security forces, called for the enactment of a law, one focusing on preventive rather than punitive measures.

Eighteen out of twenty-eight countries affected by FGM have legislated against the practice. Working with MPs is an ongoing process, as the membership shifts over the years, and as they acquire additional information, the decision about how to proceed is theirs, as representatives of their constituencies and opinion leaders.

She praises the village chiefs for their support and solidarity.

GAMCOTRAP’s activities are based on empowering grassroots communities to change their own conditions through various activities including advocacy, community mobilization and sensitization, and training and information campaigns (TIC) on harmful traditional practices and sexual and reproductive health and rights, strategies grounded in the “Rights Based Approach”.

GAMCOTRAP has begun a cluster approach for target communities particularly within the Upper River Region (North and South). This approach facilitates a social mobilization process amongst nearby communities who share similar socio-cultural and economic activities.

She illustrates the country’s situation: in a population of 1.5 million, the FGM prevalence rate is 78.3% (according to MICS SURVEY 2005/2006) and FGM of all types is practised almost all over the country. There exists a Children’s Act that loosely calls for the eradication of Harmful Traditional Practices under Article 19, but there is no law against FGM.

The Gambia has ratified many international instruments, such as: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa ‘Maputo Protocol’. But it is only the Children’s Act 2005 that domesticates the international conventions on the rights of the child.

Dr. Isatou Touray quotes Section 32 of the 1997 Constitution, which states that: “Every person shall be entitled to enjoy, practise, profess, maintain and promote any culture, language, tradition or religion subject to the terms of this Constitution and to the condition that the rights protected by this section do not impinge on the rights and freedoms of others or the national interest, especially unity”.

The proposed Women’s Bill will incorporate the Maputo Protocol, the CEDAW, and the policy on the advancement of women.

She provides the audience with an overview on the results of GAMCOTRAP’s activities. The results achieved over the years from the above Systems Approach-Community Based Sensitization can be discerned in various contexts:

- It has brought to the public eye the visibility of FGM and other HTPs and the taboos surrounding the practice has been broken.

- The advocacy work has resulted to communities recognizing the harmful effects of FGM on women’s reproductive health.

- It is also recognized as a violation of women’s sexual and reproductive rights.

- Opened up a discussion on male and female sexuality and the taboo of silence over this has been broken in almost all the communities GAMCOTRAP works with in the URR.

- The support of district authorities and opinion leaders has been solicited.

- Increased awareness about the global nature of the campaign about Female Genital Mutilation e.g. the bridge between families in the Diaspora

- Increased awareness about the negative effects of FGM has also resulted to various communities taking the initiative to drop the knife.

- On May 5th 2007, GAMCOTRAP celebrated a public declaration to stop FGM by 18 circumcisers covering 63 communities.

The trainings carried out in the communities gave rise to many recommendations: the people want to ensure that a law against FGM is put in place to help the Chiefs and Alkalolu effectively engage with the people; GAMCOTRAP should conduct similar programmes with all the chiefs in The Gambia with their Parliament members; to empower the traditional chiefs and village heads to support in the advocacy to the eradication of FGM in other regions; to also engage and strengthen the capacity of the Village Development Committees, on children’s rights and HTPs.

Despite the challenges that campaigners are facing, GAMCOTRAP believes that there is a political will on this matter, but it has to be reinforced with a policy directive and law while communities are sensitized. As a way forward, Dr. Touray urges the Upper River Region Parliament members to support their chiefs.
CONVENTIONS ON HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES RATIFIED BY THE GAMBIA

- Ms. Janet Sallah-Njie, President of Female Lawyers Association of the Gambia (FLAG) recalls the objectives of the workshop, to inform the MPs of the important of enacting legislation on FGM. She then passed to a comprehensive exposition on violence against women - the pervasive yet least recognised human rights abuse in the world - and about existing legal instruments to fight against it.

Many international bills and conventions protect the rights of women and children. The Gambia has ratified these conventions without reservations, which means that The Gambia fully agrees with the content of these international instruments and it has therefore committed itself to put them into practice. However, The Gambia does not yet have a specific bill on violence against women. The state should put into place some measures to redress and compensate the victims.

The power to make law and promote legislative reforms is in the hands of Parliament and its members should therefore try to be involved from the earliest stages.

Mrs. Sallah then provided an overview of the reality on the ground, making reference to national, regional and international legal instruments and pointing out that judges, lawyers and security agents have a key role to play regarding violence against women.

Particular reference was made to some articles in the constitution that are key to address the problem: section 33 that prohibits any discrimination, section 20 that protects from slavery, section 21 against inhuman treatments and section 7 that includes Sharia and Customary law among sources of law. She pointed out that some customary and Sharia-based practices are harmful and discriminatory, and as such they cannot be accepted as they contradict the principles enshrined in the constitution.

The Women’s bill contains provisions that are in line with the international and regional conventions ratified by The Gambia, and therefore MPs should not be concerned that they would be contradicting any principles to which they have previously agreed.

Once legislation is enacted, a very important step (which should commence even before the enactment) is the empowerment of women, as this plays a vital role in allowing them to make informed choices.

As a way forward, Mrs. Sallah calls upon parliamentarians to look at the best practices and strategies in the sub-region.

INTERNATIONAL LAWS ON FGM IN AFRICA

- Ilwad Elmi, Consultant for No Peace Without Justice, gives a brief presentation comparing existing anti-FGM laws in those African countries concerned by this practice.
She emphasizes that the adoption of national legislation is necessary because it brings to light the commitment and political will to fight against FGM. It also is:

- A response to the obligations resulting from the ratification of international treaties
- Gives a real impact during awareness campaigns and legitimacy of the activities towards fighting against FGM
- An anti-FGM legislation has a dissuasive effect on those people who are undecided whether to practice it or not
- It is an explicit political commitment to eliminate FGM on the national territory
- A way to protect women and girls wishing to abandon the practice
- A means to counter the medicalization of the practice

Of the 28 African States in which FGM is practiced, eighteen are equipped with a law which bans and places a sanction on FGM. Most of these States adopted anti-FGM legislation in the late 90's, the Central African Republic was the first country to have legislated on this issue in 1966, followed by Ghana, Djibouti, Burkina Faso, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, and Tanzania respectively in 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1998 for the last three. The last countries to have legislated on this matter are Eritrea and Egypt in 2007 and 2008. Ghana in 2007 and Djibouti in 2009 amended their national legislation to ensure the applicability of the law.

Passing to an illustration of the elements an anti-FGM law should contain, including examples referring to the various national legislation:

- a definition of FGM
- a ban and sanction on the practice
- a scale of possible sentences (with sometimes an accumulation of the sentences of imprisonment and fine, and other times, with no accumulation of sentences)
- a definition of involved persons (circumcisers, parents, others...)
- Specifically defined sentences for different categories of involved people (accomplices, witnesses)
- Possible provisions concerning aggravating circumstances (for example, in the case of death of the victim, generally 40 days following the excision)
- it can provide assistance to the victims

An example of a country where enactment of the anti-FGM law was followed by thorough application is Burkina Faso.
THE CHILDREN’S ACT- GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

- Mr. Njundu Drammeh, Child Protection Alliance, makes a presentation on the rights of the child, with a particular focus on the Children’s Act enacted in The Gambia in 2005.

The basic principle of the rights of the child is that society has an obligation to satisfy the fundamental needs of children and to provide assistance for the development of the child’s personality, talents, and abilities. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides an internationally-agreed framework of minimum standards necessary for the well-being of the child and to which every child is entitled.

The general principles regarding the rights of the child are:

- non-discrimination (article 2 of the CRC)
- best interest of the child (article 3 of the CRC)
- right to life, survival and development (article 6 of the CRC)
- respect for the views of the child (article 12 of the CRC)

The signatory States have the obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill/promote the rights enshrined in the CRD. Therefore, they have the obligation to develop programmes to give effect to child rights, particularly in relation to socio-economic rights where realisation is very dependent on the provision of public services. To reach these objectives they have to allocate resources for public awareness campaigns around child rights, for the development and the enforcement of laws relating to child rights, as well as for the implementation of programmes designed to give children access to their rights via provision of public services.

The 2005 Children’s Act foresees, in Section 19, that “No child shall be subjected to any social and cultural practices that affect the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child and, in particular, those customs and practices that are—

(a) prejudicial to the health and life of the child; and

(b) discriminatory to the child on the grounds of sex or other status”

The Children’s Act contains some gaps. First, it does not explicitly prohibit FGM. Secondly, it is not clear to which ‘social and cultural practices’ it is referring, nor to who is entitled to define which “social and cultural practices” are detrimental to the health or growth of a child. Finally, there is no provision on what is the penalty on conviction for violation of Section 19.

Mr. Drammeh remarks that legislation is not sufficient on its own, but must be accompanied by other strategies. Repressive enforcement of anti-FGM laws can be problematic, as communities that do not understand why they are being forced to give up FGM may restart as soon as
surveillance stops, and others will continue clandestinely or excise their daughters in their infancy to evade detection.

**EFFECTS OF FGM ON THE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS**

- Ms. Fatou Camara, Representative of the Ministry of Health, illustrates the dangerous health consequences caused by FGM.

  The short-term complications include pain, severe bleeding, haemorrhage, shock, acute urine retention, fracture or dislocation, infections.

  The long-term complications could result into difficulty in passing urine and recurrent urinary infection, difficulties in menstruation, inability to control urine because the urinary track is affected, painful sexual intercourse, problems in childbirth, a very painful neuroma as consequences of trapping of the clitoral nerve in the scar tissue, infertility as a result of pelvic infection caused by the procedure, cyst and abscesses on the vulva, scar tissue formation (keloids), and haematocolpus or retention of menstrual blood.

  The presentation is accompanied by graphic images and photographs of the complications discussed.

**FGM AND RELIGION**

- Imam Mohammad Sano, Religious Adviser GAMCOTRAP, addresses the issue “FGM and Religion”, stating that FGM is a cultural and not a religious matter and the Sharia aims to protect and not to harm human beings.

  The Quran says that we should not kill ourselves, and this is why we should not perform harmful practices that can result to death. Whatever is harmful is not acceptable for Islam.

  He finishes by appealing to the Members of Parliament to ban FGM and open a frank discussion on the matter.

- Imam Baba Leigh, Executive Member of GAMCOTRAP Board, elaborated on the practice of FGM and religion, expanding on three main topics:
- FGM is not in the Quran
- the Quran foresees circumcision only for men
- FGM is harmful for women and for all of society, as it entails pain, death and loss of money. There is more harm than benefit in performing FGM.

A peaceful means should be employed to eradicate FGM.

The regions of Banjul and Kombo are the two areas where FGM is performed the most, and for this reason the MPs from these areas should be even more engaged.

The imam’s final comment is that there is a double standard, as many men who are in favour of FGM, then get married with women who have not undergone the practice.

OBSERVATIONS BY DISTRICT CHIEFS ON THE FGM CAMPAIGN

Mrs. Amie Bojang Sissoho calls on the chiefs to give their reaction to the campaign they took part in.

- Alhajj Yaya Jarjusey, Lower River Region, says that FGM has been a long debate in his community but now “there is a light at the end of the tunnel”. With sensitization and knowledge it will not be difficult to change attitudes because “the issue is all about the approach” and GAMCOTRAP found the way to “win the heart of the people”. He urges the Parliament Members present to think about a law on FGM as being in the interest of the people and not to be afraid of losing votes.

- Alhajj Muhammed Krubally, Upper River Region, says that the campaign was highly useful, as he had heard about but never seen the effects of FGM before. Now he is convinced on the harmfulness of the practice, because he has gained a scientific knowledge, for instance of the difficulties during birth that can lead to health problems of the children. He believes that the advocacy of GAMCOTRAP in the Basse region helped to reduce the rate of child mortality. He adds that “seeing is believing”. He strongly believes that FGM is not compulsory in Islam, and urges the MPs to act on the issue of FGM.

REACTION AND DISCUSSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARIANS

Following the increased understanding and gained knowledge about the campaigns against FGM provided to the parliamentarians, Dr. Isatou Touray calls upon them to open up a discussion.

- Honorable Cham, Kombo North Constituency affirms that the Parliament members are now adequately equipped with the necessary information and now need to address the issue.
He suggests that the expectations expressed in the workshop about the responsibilities of the parliamentarians are very strong, and adds that he now understands that they have been perceived as not fulfilling their role. To address this, he suggests that the approach have two sequential elements: initially, full-fledged empowerment, including technical aid, and subsequently, development of a private member bill – and for this he thanks FLAG in advance for their promise of assistance.

He points out that among challenges faced by Parliament is that the public does not express ongoing interest in their work and deliberation, and so he encourages the public to come and listen to the Parliament sessions.

He notes the fact that sometimes international instruments are ratified but not domesticated, and points out that this is often a result of constraints and insufficient support for the process of domestication. The Parliament needs cooperation and adequate support to carry out its work.

He emphasizes that to eradicate harmful practices is both an individual and collective responsibility: “We must face the reality!” and “Change has to start from us and then go outside”, and provides the example of his experience: he resisted the pressure for his three daughters to be subjected to FGM.

- Honorable Yorro Bah, Lower Fulladu Constituency, congratulates the chiefs for their support and he says that while this constitutes an inroad into the general attitude about the issue, people still need adequate sensitization, and emphasizes that religious misinterpretation has been part of the confusion.

He urges FGM activists to continue to engage Parliament members as well as the Chiefs and Parliament Members to be engaged as the people get back to them.

- Honorable Abdoulie Saine, Banjul Central Constituency, says that a private member bill would be an important opportunity for the parliamentarians to move step forwards. He also encourages people to come to the Parliament sessions and to support its work. Besides, he urges Parliamentarians to be engaged and to start facilitating the process.

Finally, he states that FGM is harmful and should be eradicated.

- Honorable Paul Mendy, Kombo South Constituency, congratulates the workshop’s organizers. He says that parliamentarians have a great deal to do on this issue and as they are responsible for their electorate they must move forward.

According to the Hon. Mendy, more sensitization is required, and he expresses doubts about enacting legislation not considered acceptable by the population: since 90% of his constituency practices FGM, there would be lack of understanding and people would demonstrate against such a law.

Finally, he points out that the media should assist in the sensitization campaign.
Honorable Lamin Jadame, Niamina West Constituency, thanks the organizers and assures all present that everybody is in the struggle, as the practice affects everyone. He reminds participants that President Jammeh himself has openly stated that he is not against the abandonment of the practice, and that the process has to be undertaken respectfully.

He says he is personally convinced of the harmfulness of FGM, but he highlights that more sensitization is the key, because “It is good to be ambitious but sometimes it is problematic to be over-ambitious”. He continues saying “my fear is not to lose my seat, but it is would I be at peace if my electorate remain convinced about it, it is why sensitization is important.” In his opinion, the three arms of the State should work together to achieve important objectives.

Honorable Bekai, Camara Wuli Gast Constituency, thanks the organizers and points out that while the pictures shown in the session on “Effects on Health” were very dramatic and emotive, he has previously seen even more horrifying pictures, all of which demonstrate that FGM cannot be considered culture or tradition, but only ‘hate’. He says “religious leaders have failed in their efforts to justify religion now they are using tradition to defend the practice.” He appeals to his colleagues to help stop the practice by taking a clear and unequivocal stand.

Honorable Sidie Jatta Wuli, West Constituency, recalls the facts that this has been the third time Parliamentarians have worked directly with GAMCOTRAP and now they have the necessary knowledge and data to advocate.

The change should not come by force, but through education and raising awareness; “we should begin to talk to our people and engage them in the process of enlightenment”.

He argues that it is important to bridge the gap between the government and the people, and between activists and the people.

The fight against FGM should start at the nuclear familiar level, as demonstrate his experience with his daughter. “We need new lens to look at culture and tradition; not everything in culture is good and it needs to be evaluated”.

INTERVENTION OF A WOMAN LEADER

Aja Nano Touray, from Foni Sibanor, says that today she has realized that also Parliamentarians are part of the struggle against FGM, and as such thinks that there should therefore be more frequent interaction with them. According to her, resistance to elimination campaigns originates from ignorance. She reminds everyone that many women and girls suffer in silence and cannot get married because of the problems caused by FGM. She finishes arguing “that what happened to us should not happen to our children”.

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DISCUSSION

- Dr. Touray commends the parliamentarians present for bringing out the issues of concern to them and being willing to discuss them openly. She praises the intellectual level of the presentation and of the speakers, as well as the level of engagement shown by all participants.

This workshop is a turning point that opens the door for constructive engagement, towards a positive change for women and girls in The Gambia.

Even if there are not many resources available to the activists working to end FGM, they will continue to engage in processes of consultation and be willing to share whatever is available.

She recalls that the lack of information and knowledge of women is often utilized to perpetuate the violence on them.

Before moving to the final declaration, Dr. Touray summarizes the points which the Parliament members agreed on:

- Female Genital Mutilation is a harmful traditional practice
- Personally the parliamentarians present do not want their daughters to be subjected to FGM
- There is an information gap that should be filled by promoting the engagement of the media
- The parliamentarians present want to engage with their constituencies and move towards positive change by enacting legislation banning FGM
- FGM violate fundamental rights

Dr. Touray once again affirms that the enactment of anti-FGM legislation is required by the people of the Gambia and that, among others, the “Dropping of the Knife” campaign clearly demonstrates the desire to bring about change.

- A parliamentarian new to the discussion of issues surrounding FGM intervenes expressing his doubts about enacting such a law: he had not been aware that FGM was a violation of human rights and harmful, and that therefore he considers that there is need for further sensitization campaigns before proposing a law to ban the practice.

- Binta Jammeh Sindibal of the APGWA (Association Promoting Girls and Women Advancement), commenting on the previous intervention, points out that activists have been working for 25 years throughout the country, inviting also MPs to all events: sensitization has been ongoing for decades, and all elements of society have been involved.

- Ousman Yarbo, Director of TANGO, says that a clear engagement to fight FGM has been taken and the participants should come to a resolution that expresses the view of the majority of them.
• Honorable Yorro Bah, Lower Fulladu Constituency, wants to remark that the parliamentarians
not to commit to legislating immediately, but they can engage themselves to follow-up and
further the sensitization among colleagues and constituencies.

• Dr. Touray reminds all that the final declaration will be a joint document containing the
outcomes of the workshop, not to be confused with a law that the MPs will work on upon their
return to Parliament.

• Njundu Drammeh, Child Protection Alliance, recalls the importance of unity to fight for a
common cause, and the necessity to change ourselves before going out and change the
communities and the constituencies.

THE DECLARATION

The text drafted in the course of the discussion and interventions throughout the day is shown
on screen and read aloud, allowing parliamentarians to intervene and propose amendments and
to approve, one by one, each of the sections. The amendments they propose are overall on
issues of form rather than substance.

- the term “states” replaces “governments”
- the term “promulgate/formulate” replaces “implement”
- the term “Parliament” replaces “National Assembly”
- the expression “We, the Parliamentarians present” replaces “We, the Parliamentarians”
- The Final Declaration is approved unanimously, passed to the organizers for final editing.

During the approval of the declaration, a lengthy discussion among the parliamentarians begins
regarding concrete legislative aspects of a possible future law against the FGM.

VOTE OF THANKS

• Honorable Alaji Sillah, Banjul Central Constituency, gives the vote of thanks and summarizes
the aim of the workshop: “Sensitisation on the need for legislation”. He assures all present that the
parliamentarians will give their support to the struggle to end FGM.

CLOSING STATEMENT

• Mrs. Isatou Graham, on the behalf of the Minister of Justice, addresses the closing statement.
She apologises for the absence of the Minister and she says she is honoured to be at the National Workshop on her behalf.

She praises GAMCOTRAP, NPWJ, the Ministry of Health, and the Coalition against FGM in Gambia for intensifying their activities to eliminate all forms of FGM.

She recalls that the Gambia was the first African Union Member State to sign the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, and also ratified other relevant conventions.

She states that Section 19 of the Children’s Act of the Gambia (2005) clearly incorporates several of the international provisions concerning the rights of the child.

She says that her presence at the workshop is a testimony to the importance the Ministry of Justice attaches to well being, the protection and the development of women and children.

She further points out that “customary obligations and the multi-cultural character of many local cultures have also made it difficult to improve legislation and sensitize ethnic groups observing such tradition about the health consequences and related dangers”.

Finally she recommends taking the following measures to overcome the challenges:

- to sensitize and train parliamentarians and legislators on the human rights of women
- to implement effective strategies, such as “Dropping the Knife” adopted by GAMCOTRAP.

After formal thanks, Mrs. Isatou Graham declares the workshop close.

Dr. Touray finishes by saying “It’s not the end; it’s the beginning of the end.”

**COMMENTARIES AND FOLLOW-UP**

- The Final Declaration demonstrates a clear commitment taken by the members of Parliament participating in the workshop, and it represents an important step towards the enactment of an effective and comprehensive law against FGM.

- the day following the workshop, one of the parliamentarians who had attended presented himself to the office of the Female Lawyers Association of The Gambia to ask for the organization’s legal consultancy with regards to the Women’s bill that is going to be discussed in Parliament.

- Coverage of the event among local and continental media was wide-reaching:
  - Local Newspapers: The Point, Foroyaa, Today, Daily Observers

- Radio broadcast on GRTS (Gambia Radio and Television Services) in English, Mandinka, Wollof, Fula, Jola, Sarahulah