REGIONAL CONFERENCE AGAINST FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION CONDUCTED IN ASMARA

A regional conference against female genital mutilation in the Horn of Africa was conducted from March 27 to 28 at the Hager Media Hall within the premises of the Ministry of Information here in Asmara. The conference organized by the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), representatives from Djibouti, Rwanda and Uganda, as well as different international and regional organizations and invited guests took part.

Speaking at the conference, the Chairperson of NUEW, Ms. Leul Gebreab, stressed the significance of such a conference as it is being held at a time when Eritrea is striving to avoid backward and harmful practices through adopting proclamations prohibiting harmful traditional practice. She underlined that despite the fact that Eritrea has issued proclamation against female circumcision and is working diligently to control and prevent the harmful practice, a lot still remains to be done to fully uproot FGM.

Also speaking on behalf of the preparatory committee, Ms. Tsegaa Gaim, expressed appreciation to the participants for attending the conference and pointed out that its main objective is to create a conducive ground for exchanging experience and avoid female circumcision in this region. Noting that the NUEW has all along been striving to put an end to female genital mutilation, she explained

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that Eritrea's issuance of a proclamation prohibiting female circumcision was an encouraging step that pleased not only Eritrean nationals but also concerned countries, the region and the world at large. Hence, encouraging response has been obtained, she added.

The Director General of General Service in the Ministry of Health, Mr. Berhan Gebretinsae, on his part indicated that although the practice of female circumcision is deeply rooted in Eritrean culture, the EPLF has been combating this harmful practice since the days of the armed struggle. He added that the adoption of Proclamation No. 157/2007 attests to this fact. Mr. Berhan further explained that there are over 164 million FGM victims and the practice is still threatening more than 3 million women. In this regard, he stressed the need for coordinated endeavors to control and avoid the harmful traditional practice.

Moreover, representatives from Djibouti, Rwanda and Uganda shared experience regarding the practice of female genital mutilation in their respective countries and the initiatives being taken to avoid it.

Following in-depth discussions and debate, the conference participants pledged to play active role in endeavors to prevent and control female circumcision. The participants also adopted a number of significant resolutions and recommendations.