Solemn Appeal against Female Genital Mutilation

We have decided to speak and to act, aware that silence is the best ally of a terrible practice that still affects millions of women.

“There are practices that our ancestors themselves, if they came back to life, would find obsolete and outdated,” said the great African sage Amadou Hampaté Bâ.

There are now between 120 and 130 million women around the world who have suffered due to female genital mutilation (FGM). Every year, two million girls and young women are subjected to this practice that still survives despite the measures taken in many of the countries involved to try to eliminate it. While sub-Saharan Africa, as well as some parts of the Arab peninsula, i.e., Yemen and Oman and certain parts of the Far East, remain the homelands of the practice, these are not the only places affected. As a result of emigration from these areas towards industrialised countries, Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are also now involved.

Concerned by the persistence and geographical magnitude of female genital mutilation,

we the undersigned, the signatories of this Appeal, have decided to speak and to act, aware that silence is the best ally of a terrible practice which still affects millions of women.

While, in the last twenty years, people have begun to talk and it is easier to evaluate the damage caused by FGM;

While, many leading politicians and members of civil society - including many of the signatories of this appeal - have fought and continue to fight against it courageously;

While, many States have decided to attempt to eliminate it and have taken legislative, administrative and other measures to this end, in particular -in Africa- by creating a joint coordination structure;

However, the persistence of FGM, including infibulation - its most violent form - demonstrates the limits of the measures taken so far and the need for us to become more personally involved in the struggle for its elimination.

While we note that FGM may have been forced on women as an attempt to reinforce and to codify the traditional roles of the sexes, the practice of the removal of...
all or part of the external female genital organs is not prescribed by any religion, and is
now in total contradiction with the universally accepted principles of respect for the
physical and moral integrity of the individual, and of equality in dignity and in rights
of the sexes, and constitutes an unacceptable abuse against women. In addition to the
psychological harm it produces, it also leads to countless medical complications and
contributes to the persistence of high rates of female mortality in the countries where
it is still widely practiced.

Today, most African and Asian countries affected by this custom have signed and
ratified the principal international conventions that condemn it, in particular the
international Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against
Most of them have also supported United Nations resolutions that call for its
elimination, in particular the plan of action of the Cairo Conference on population

— Aware that the international legal instruments to fight against female genital
mutilation already exist;
— Convinced that the States involved must do more to implement them and to
persuade the populations involved in the practice that they will lose none of their
identity by giving it up,
— Convinced that instead they will gain in dignity by becoming aware that
traditions and cultures that are unable to evolve are more at risk of becoming extinct.

We, the women and men, signatories of this Appeal, born in countries where
female genital mutilation has been traditionally practiced or in countries where it has
been imported in recent times, or simply eager to fight against a custom that violates
the rights and the dignity of millions of women around the world, pledge to use all our
influence and to do everything in our ability to contribute to its eradication.

For this reason, we solemnly call upon:

the Heads of State, the Governments and the Parliamentarians of the countries in
which Female Genital Mutilation are traditionally practiced:

to ensure the respect of the human rights of women and girls, in particular the right
not to be subjected to discrimination, and the right to health, to physical integrity and
to life;

to legislate — in countries which don’t yet have specific legislation — to consider
Female Genital Mutilation as a violation of fundamental rights of the human person
and to provide for sanctions for those who practice it;

to promote information campaigns to bring about a lasting change in the
behaviours of the populations that practice Female Genital Mutilation, addressed to
all social classes and taking into consideration all the aspects of the practice: human
rights, health, social and gender relations, involving national and local institutions, non-governmental organisations, traditional and religious leaders and the media; to include programmes for the prevention of the practice in reproductive health policies and to guarantee universal access to the health services; to set aside sufficient funds for these initiatives.

the governments and the Parliamentarians of the immigration countries: harmonise the existing legislative framework on Female Genital Mutilation and to ensure that all legislative measures are accompanied by information campaigns to ensure that the law is understood, accepted, applied and respected; to consider carefully the application of penalties against Female Genital Mutilation in order to ensure their effectiveness; to consider the possibility of granting residence permits and protection to the victims of this practice and to recognise the right of asylum for women and girls who risk genital mutilation.

International organisations and the governments of the countries concerned, as well as donor countries: to support information campaigns, education programmes and reproductive health initiatives that aim to eradicate female genital mutilation; to support the work of non-governmental organisations, associations, and women’s or youth groups, as well as networks of such bodies; to contribute to effect the reforms necessary to promote equality between the sexes.

local, national and international non-governmental organisations: to reinforce collaboration and co-ordination of interventions, as well as to capitalize upon the results obtained, in order to increase the effectiveness of their actions and to achieve as soon as possible the goal of the complete eradication of Female Genital Mutilation; to intensify collaboration between organisations in the countries of origin and immigration countries of women who have suffered Female Genital Mutilation in order to prevent the practice among migrant populations.

Finally, we call upon all women and men of good-will all over the world to do everything they can to help to abolish the practice of Female Genital Mutilation, with the aim of ensuring that it disappears completely within fifteen years, so that, in the countries concerned, a new generation of women, equal to everyone else in rights and in dignity, will be born.
AFRO-ARAB EXPERT CONSULTATION ON LEGAL TOOLS FOR THE PREVENTION OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

CAIRO, 21-23 JUNE 2003
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Agenda Program

SATURDAY, JUNE 21, 2003

9:00 – 10.00  
Coffee and Registration of participants

10:00 – 11:15  
OPENING SESSION

Chair Keynote Speaker: H.E. Ms. Suzanne Mubarak, First Lady, Egypt
Rapporteur: Amb. Moushira Khattab, Secretary General, NCCM, Egypt
Sheikh Mohammed Sayed Tantawy, Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar
H.H. Pope Shenouda III, Patriarch of Alexandria and See of St. Mark (to be confirmed)
Mariam Lamizana, Minister of Social Action and National Solidarity, Burkina Faso
Jaap Doek, Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child
Emma Bonino, Member of the European Parliament, Italy

11:15 - 13.00  
PROGRAMS FOR THE PREVENTION OF FGM

Moushira Khattab, Secretary General, NCCM, Egypt
The activities of the National Council of Childhood and Motherhood in the field of FGM

Daniela Colombo, President, AIDOS, Italy
The “Stop FGM” Campaign

Aziza Hussein, President, Egyptian Society for the Prevention of Harmful Practices - ESHHP, Egypt
The Egyptian Society for the Prevention of Harmful Practices: twenty years of experience

Amna Abdel Rahman, Vice President, Inter-African Committee against traditional practices - IAC, Ethiopia
The “Zero Tolerance to FGM” IAC program

Hamdi El Sayed, Chair of Medical Syndicate, Egypt
Medical Ethics Perspectives

13.00 - 15.00  
LUNCH

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: MAME BASSINE NIANG, HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONER, SENEGAL

CAIRO, 21-23 JUNE 2003
15.00 - 18.00

BACKGROUND FOR WORKING GROUP DISCUSSION

Chairs: Daniela Colombo, President, AIDOS, Italy; Gianfranco Dell'Alba, Secretary General, NPWJ, Italy

Laura Katzive, CRR, United States
Using Legislation to Promote Women’s Rights: considerations in drafting and implementing legislation to prevent FGM

Nahid Toubia, President, RAINBO, United Kingdom
Legislation as a tool for behaviour change

COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

Kenya: Ken Wafula, Lawyer
Mali: Sidibé Kadidia Maïga Aoudou, President, AMSOPT
Burkina Faso: Gisèle Kambou, Secretary General, Voix de Femmes
Fareda Banda, University of London School of Oriental and African Studies
FGM and the law in Europe
Kady Koita: President, European women network Fgm and civil society activities in Europe
Antonio Vigilante: Undp resident coordinator, Egypt

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Moderator: Katherine Hall Martinez, Director of International Program, CRR, United States

SUNDAY, JUNE 22, 2003

9.00 - 9.30
Coffee

9.30 - 13.00
WORKING GROUPS

WORKING GROUP I
Desirability and objectives of adopting legislation as a tool for social change

WORKING GROUP II
Technical elements of law on FGM

13.00 - 15.00
LUNCH
KEYNOTE SPEAKER: HALIMA WARZAZI, UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

15.00 - 18.00
RESUMED WORKING GROUPS

MONDAY, JUNE 23, 2003

9.00 - 10.15
PRESENTATION OF THE WORKING GROUPS REPORT AND ADOPTION OF A STRATEGY DOCUMENT ON FGM LEGISLATION

10.15 - 10.30
Coffee break

10.30 - 13.00
CLOSING SESSION

10.30 - 11.00
PRESS CONFERENCE: PRESENTATION OF THE EXPERT CONSULTATION RESULTS

Moushira Khattab, Secretary General, NCCM, Egypt
Emma Bonino, Member of the European Parliament, Italy
Daniela Colombo, President, AIDOS, Italy
Mona El-Tobgui, ESPHP, Egypt

11.00 - 12.30
PROJECTS PRESENTATIONS

Chiku Lweno, TAMWA
Media Campaign against FGM in Tanzania
Laetitia Palleva, NPWJ and Cristiana Scoppa, AIDOS
The Stop FGM International Appeal and Web Portal
Mona El-Tobgui, ESPHP
Media Campaign against FGM in Egypt
Sophie Bessis, writer
FGM Dictionary

12.30
CONCLUSIONS OF THE EXPERT CONSULTATION
AFRO-ARAB EXPERT CONSULTATION ON LEGAL TOOLS
FOR THE PREVENTION OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

CAIRO, 21-23 JUNE 2003