BANFGM: TOWARDS THE ELIMINATION OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

A clarion call to National Assembly Members: “Listen to the voices of the communities to prohibit FGM through legislation”

Jarra Soma, the Gambia • 21 May 2015

On the occasion of the consultative workshop “BanFGM: Towards The Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation” organised by GAMCOTRAP and No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ), in collaboration with the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices and with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, on 21 May 2015 in Jarra Soma, participants agreed upon the following clarion call addressed to National Assembly Members of the Gambia.

We, the Traditional Leaders, National Women Councillors, former FGM practitioners and members of the media participating in the workshop,

Recalling the overall objective of the workshop to promote and advocate for a specific law banning FGM and legal reform towards the eradication of FGM in the Gambia;

Recalling also the specific objectives of the meeting, namely:

- to consult with the Traditional Leaders about the work done in their respective regions with regards to ending FGM;
- to initiate a consultation process between Traditional Leaders and Women Leaders;
- to facilitate an inclusive dialogue among all parties involved on the requirements and provisions in international and regional legislation frameworks requiring the adoption of a specific law prohibiting FGM;

Guided in our work by the National Gender and Women Empowerment Policy 2010-2020, and specifically Objective 4 which emphasises the elimination of all forms of discriminatory and harmful sexual and cultural practices by 2015, and UNGA Resolution 69/150,
Pledging to continue to work with civil society to continue to build capacity to carry out effective advocacy,

Pledging also to continue to collaborate with the Government and follow up on the FGM Bill with stakeholders and beneficiaries,

Taking cognisance of the outcome of similar workshops held from 2005 up to the present in the Gambia to advance the women’s rights agenda,

Taking into account the Heads of States commitment to end FGM in Africa, and one of the themes of the African Women’s decade to promote women’s rights and gender equality,

Commending the collaborative efforts of No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ) and the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices, the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the dedication of women’s rights organisations to this cause,

Commending the efforts made in the different regions of the Gambia through “Dropping of the Knife” ceremonies and public declarations by communities and former FGM practitioners,

Acknowledging the leadership taken by the Traditional Leaders to support their communities to end FGM,

Appreciating the Government’s efforts toward the implementation of grassroots and national commitments on gender equality and women’s empowerment by creating an environment conducive to constructive engagement,

Welcoming the Government’s active engagement, in partnership with civil society, in Zero Tolerance Day to FGM celebrations to promote the human rights of women and girls,

Reflecting on past efforts undertaken to empower National Assembly Members to make informed decisions towards the adoption of a law prohibiting FGM, including:

- In 2005, a series of trainings with Parliamentarians organised by GAMCOTRAP in partnership with Save the Children, which contributed to the passing of the Children’s Act 2005;
- In 2006, a consultation with Parliamentarians which contributed to the full ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), which in its Article 5, calls for enacting legislation banning FGM;
- In 2009, a Parliamentary Workshop titled “Engaging Parliament Towards Ending Female Genital Mutilation”;
- In 2010, the participation of GAMCOTRAP and four Gambian Parliamentarians in the Inter-parliamentary Conference "Harmonization of legal instruments against FGM: Consolidating achievements, sharing successes, pursuing advances! Towards a
United Nations ban on FGM,” in Dakar, Senegal, aimed at discussing strategies to bring FGM to the world’s attention;

- In 2013, a National Consultative Meeting organized by GAMCOTRAP and funded by Save the Children International and UN Women, at the conclusion of which the two hundred and sixty delegates from the Seven Regions of the Gambia issues a consensus call for the Gambia to enact a law to prohibit FGM.

Recalling the right of the girl-child to her physical integrity, and recalling that it is National Assembly Members’ mandate to promulgate laws and policies in the best interest of the child,

Commending the adoption by National Assembly Members of several policies and laws on women; such as The Children’s Act 2005, The Sexual Violence Act 2013 and the Domestic Violence Act 2013;

Deeply concerned that despite efforts to support the National Assembly’s commitment to end FGM, with capacity-building activities and financial support, there has been yet no progress toward adopting a law banning FGM;

Concerned that National Assembly Members have not capitalised on efforts of Traditional Leaders and National Women Councillors, who have taken a leading role in their communities to protect girls from FGM,

We, the Participants,

Call on National Assembly Members to build upon the African Union’s African Women’s Decade to bring about change in the lives of Gambian girls, women and the community at large;

Urge National Assembly Members to prioritise the implementation of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 69/150 “Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilations”, to build upon the commitment of the Government of The Gambia to advance women’s rights and their empowerment, as well as to fulfil the policy commitment contained in the National Gender and Women Empowerment Policy 2010-2020, and specifically Objective 4: “To lobby for the elimination of all forms of discriminatory and harmful sexual and cultural practices by 2015”;

Finally, Urge National Assembly Members to respond to this Clarion Call by Traditional Rulers, National Women Councillors, and former FGM practitioners to pass the proposed Bill to prohibit FGM by the end of 2015.

Consensus agreed upon by Participants of the Consultation,
Held in Jarra Soma, Kaira Konko
Lower River Region of the Gambia
21 May 2015