Speech of Her Excellency Mrs Marie Therese Abena Ondo nee Obama,  
Minister of the Advancement of Women and Family, Cameroon

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High Level Parallel Event  
A Worldwide Ban on Female Genital Mutilation: from the Decision of the African Union  
to a United Nations General Assembly Resolution  

New York, 27 February 2012  

Your Excellency, the First Lady of Burkina Faso,  

Dear Colleagues, Dear Guests,  

I am very happy to take the floor here today to assure you that the phenomenon of female genital mutilation (FGM) is unfortunately present in Cameroon. At the national level, we have data which shows that 1.4 percent of women have undergone the practice. In two of the 10 regions that compose the country, this figure may reach 20 percent. This is not limited to these two regions; there are also big cosmopolitan cities, where people from all regions as well as other African countries now live, so the phenomenon is also present in big urban centers like Yaoundé.

What is the Government doing? Besides collecting data, the Government has ratified most instruments for the protection of women’s and children’s rights. We have also undertaken outreach work at the grassroots level, because we are dealing with a practice rooted in tradition. Locals will tell you that FGM is “the way it is”. A woman who has not undergone the practice is considered dirty, nobody would eat the food she cooks. Therefore, we are working with traditional authorities in order to promote understanding of the wrongness of this practice.

More than once we have received assurances that practitioners of FGM will abandon this practice. The challenge, however, was how to help them reestablish financial autonomy [from another source of income] after having done so. To this end, we provided them with a means to undertake income-generating activities. However, since our borders permit the movement of people from one region to another, this practice continues.

We will not give up and we hope that one day we will arrive at the full elimination of this practice. Last December we therefore launched a national action plan for the elimination of female genital mutilation in Cameroon.

We hope that before long we will be able to talk about this practice using only the past tense. Much effort and work is being put into the adoption of a law [eliminating FGM] at the National Assembly.

I thank you.