Speech of H.E. Raymonde Coffie Goudou,  
Minister of Family, Women and Children, Ivory Coast

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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

The First Lady of Burkina Faso, 
Ladies and Gentlemen Ministers, 
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I would like to begin by telling you that in Ivory Coast, in 1998, a law was passed against female genital mutilation (FGM). The only concern that we have today is that at the beginning we undertake certain actions, and then we run into a problem, and have to start again from scratch as outreach, after a certain point, is no longer useful. Nature abhors vacuum, and so as soon as we stop outreach measures, women take up the knife again, and the practice resumes.

In the Ivory Coast, differently than in the experience of my Tunisian counterpart, we have an Imam, Imam Djiguiba Cisse, whose presence I want to mention to you because he is one of the greatest activists against female genital mutilation and forced marriage in the Ivory Coast. From my own point of view, as a Minister of Family, Woman and the Child, I follow the example of Imam Djiguiba Cisse; I walk with him, he in front and me behind.

I went recently, I believe on 1 February, for the observance of those days, to a village called Kotolo, located in the North, a few kilometers away from Dabakala. In this village, the chief of the township is a fervent advocate of genital mutilation, encouraging women to practice FGM. Everyone told me that I would run into difficulties, as he is provincial and narrow-minded. Unfortunately, during the most recent excisions (FGM), a three-year-old girl died. This is what motivated me and inspired me to travel to this village. We realized that the customs and practices of the Dabakala region are the same as those in the center of the country, within the Baoule community. I used this fact to reach out to the chief and I will use him to help us in the fight against FGM in the region.

We succeeded in addressing this challenge and we hope with Imam Djiguiba Cisse to touch the communities [who are affected by this practice]. Because these are not religious, but rather traditional practices, which have nothing to do with religion. This must be clear. We must ensure that people understand this, as those who practice FGM are in communities, and so this needs to be explained to them at length.

I commend the Resolution, but as with all Resolutions, Your Excellency, in Ivory Coast we are well placed to know that the vast array of Resolutions are effective only when applied. It
will be due to solidarity amongst us border states, that we will succeed in having this Resolution applied. This must not be an isolated effort. Together we must stand and, hand-in-hand, to undertake actions to prevent and to eliminate this scourge.

I thank you.