



IAC - CIAF

Geneva, 6 February 2012 - N°358

9th International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation

More comprehensive legislative and preventive efforts needed to end FGM

On the 9th International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), the Geneva-based International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC) and the Geneva Human Rights Office, call for the adoption of more human-rights based legislation to end FGM.

On 30 September 2011, the Federal Assembly of the Swiss Confederation modified its penal code to explicitly ban FGM. By taking this important step forward, Switzerland has joined other destination countries including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Italy, Luxemburg, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, all of which have changed their legal frameworks to address FGM.

Under the new Swiss legislation, perpetrators of FGM will face prison sentences of up to ten years. The law will apply to all mutilations performed anywhere in the world, regardless of the nationality of the author or victim, provided that the former is in Switzerland. The fact that FGM is not penalized in the country where the mutilation occurred will not constitute a defence in the Swiss courts.

This legislation is an important step forward to protect women and girls from migrant communities that practice FGM, living in Switzerland. But much more remains to be done to address FGM in the context of migration. Migration has resulted in the once relatively remote practice of FGM becoming a reality in most developed countries hosting migrants from FGM-practicing communities. According to the European Parliament in its 2009 resolution on "*Combating Female Genital Mutilation in the European Union*," some 500,000 cut women currently live in Europe and every year approximately 180,000 women and girls migrants undergo, or are in danger of undergoing, FGM.

"The attitude of traditionally practicing populations does not evolve simply because of migration. Sometimes, adherence to FGM is maintained and this is why countries of destination must proactively address this issue if we are to succeed in our global commitment to end this practice in one generation," says Ambassador William Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration.

A comprehensive and human-rights based legislative framework is one of the effective tools at the disposal of host countries. As part of its work on the Rights of the Child as well as on Violence against Women, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has for many years urged parliaments to enact and enforce such new legislation on FGM. "Adopting new laws is an important first step, but full implementation needs to be encouraged," says Mr. Abdelwahad Radi, President of the IPU.

The four partners stress that for legislative reforms to play a positive and sustainable role in the abandonment of FGM, they need to be introduced in a manner that changes the way that people perceive the practice, ensuring that the communities themselves decide to abide by the law because they see the benefits of respecting the health and human rights of their daughters and wives.

Engaging FGM-practicing communities in dialogue and offering human rights education programmes is one way to achieve this. "Ultimately, what really matters is to bring about a deep and sustainable social change, originating from within the communities" says Fabienne Bugnon, Director of the Geneva Office of Human Rights. In the canton of Geneva, her Office and IOM have conducted non-stigmatizing sensitization campaigns with Ethiopian, Sudanese, Somali and Eritrean communities. The IPU has also

mobilized parliaments and legislators, most recently in Mali, to promote public consultations that ensure acceptance by the population, prior to the introduction of new legislation.

African countries and NGOs, such as the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, which has been advocating for the abandonment of FGM since 1984, have also been active in global efforts to legislate against FGM.

"In July 2011, African Heads of State, meeting in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea during the 17th African Union Summit, decided to support a draft international resolution on FGM to be presented at the 66th ordinary session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. It calls to develop and strengthen regional and international legal instruments and national legislation to address FGM", explained the IAC Director, Dr. Morissanda Kouyate.

With an estimated 100 to 140 million girls and women worldwide currently living with the consequences of FGM, the need for all countries – including countries hosting practicing migrant communities - to renew their commitment and join forces to end FGM is more pressing than ever.

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The Partners

- **The IOM:** An intergovernmental organization established in 1951, IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. IOM currently has 146 Members and 98 observers. It's approximately 7,300 staff worked on more than 2, 900 projects in 2010. www.iom.int
- **The IPU:** Established in 1889 and with its Headquarters in Geneva, the IPU - the oldest political multilateral organization - has a membership of 159 parliaments, with nine regional assemblies as associate members. The IPU has an Office in New York, which acts as its Permanent Observer to the United Nations. www.ipu.org
- **The ODH - DSPE:** The Office for Human Rights is attached to the Department for Security, Police and the Environment of the Canton of Geneva. It is tasked with helping develop an active human rights-based policy. Its scope includes the integration of foreigners, the promotion of gender equality, the prevention of domestic violence and international solidarity. www.ge.ch/dspe/droits-humains
- **The IAC** is an international non-profit non-governmental organisation. Founded in 1984 in Dakar, Senegal, it was the first NGO network in Africa to take up the issue of FGM at the grassroots, regional and international levels. IAC works to promote the basic human rights of women and children. It is a member organisation that works through its national Committees in 28 African states and affiliates in 16 non-African countries. IAC's headquarters are located at the premises of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and there is a Liaison Office in Geneva, Switzerland. www.iac-ciaf.com