

“Violence against Women, abandoning female genital mutilation: the role of national parliaments”

African parliamentary conference organised in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

Dakar, Senegal, 4 and 5 December 2005

Concept paper

1. Title of the Conference

The theme of the Conference will be: **Violence against women, abandoning female genital mutilation: the role of national parliaments.**

2. Venue and dates

The Conference is scheduled to take place on 4 and 5 December 2005 in Dakar, Senegal, at the Hotel Méridien Président.

3. Objectives

The primary objective of the Regional Conference is to ensure the political commitment of MPs at the continental level to abandoning the traditional harmful practice of FGM by sensitizing and mobilizing them on the issue.

In achieving this objective, the Conference aims to:

- promote awareness and inform parliamentarians of the latest developments on FGM and discuss challenges ahead;
- discuss mechanisms and strategies to eradicate FGM. This will include debates on the role of legislation, examples of effective provisions contained in existing legislation, and the challenges in implementing legislation;
- discuss alternative initiatives, in addition to legislation, to eradicate FGM, including advocacy and community-based mechanisms;
- share best practices and draw on the experience of different countries in the region;
- introduce the various stakeholders (NGOs, community leaders, practitioners, international organizations) to parliamentarians and facilitate a dialogue among them on new initiatives to be taken at the regional and national levels.

4. Host Parliament and Organizers

The Conference will take place in Dakar at the invitation of the National Assembly of Senegal. It will be organized by the APU, with the technical support of the IPU and UNICEF. The Conference would also benefit from UNICEF's substantive expertise on the issue.

5. Topics for debate

In order to focus the debate on the involvement of parliaments and their members, the topics and sub-topics for the debate would be as follows:

- Female genital mutilation: where do we stand today?
- The experience of Parliaments in the field of legislations aimed to combat FGM;

- Beyond legislation: Building an environment to combat FGM, by taking action at the community level, changing mentalities and working with civil society, and adopting institutional national mechanisms and enhancing international cooperation;
- A broader approach to combat FGM.

Through these topics, the Conference will aim to identify measures that can be supported by parliamentary action, at both the national and international levels, to combat FGM, to address the specific human challenges involved and work to improve cooperation in finding solutions to the problem.

6. Preparatory process and Coordinating Committee

Following the approval Executive Committee of the APU in its 46th Session held in Luanda, Angola, May 2005, the APU General Secretariat carried out preparations in cooperation with the host Parliament, the IPU and the UNICEF. The Conference will establish a Coordinating Committee to work with the IPU and UNICEF on the final document of the Conference.

7. Participants and observers

The Conference would be open to delegations from all African parliaments, members and non-members of the APU. Representatives of Parliaments of other countries where FGM is prevalent may be invited by the IPU to take part in the Conference.

Each delegation would be made up of a maximum of five parliamentarians; the ratio of male to female parliamentarians should be as balanced as possible. Delegations are expected to include as much as possible parliamentarians working in the field of the abandonment of FGM or other relevant social and human and women's rights fields.

While the focus is on the participation of parliamentarians, the Regional Conference aims to introduce parliamentarians to the major stakeholders, including the media, non-governmental organizations, community leaders, religious scholars, legal experts, practitioners and international organizations. Each of these will therefore also be represented at the Regional Conference.

Organizations that enjoy the status of observers at the Conferences of the APU and the IPU, as well as other organizations and institutions invited on an *ad hoc* basis in view of their expertise on the topics under debate, would be allowed to contribute to the deliberations as observers.

8. Distribution of results and follow-up

The Conference would provide an opportunity for a press conference, particularly once the final document is adopted.

The final declaration would be presented to the relevant bodies of the three partner organizations (APU, IPU, UNICEF), which would allow each to decide on the appropriate follow-up measures. For its part, UNICEF will determine, in cooperation with its field offices, the APU and the IPU, appropriate follow-up action with African national parliaments.

All the debates will be recorded and, after the Conference, an illustrated report summarizing the deliberations will be published and distributed widely among all parliaments by the APU and IPU. UNICEF would also distribute the report.

9. Working Languages

Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in Arabic, English and French.