



Concept note

Expert Meeting on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation -What Could Parliamentarians Do?-

House of Representatives, The Hague, 19th of June 2012

The Netherlands Section of the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA), AWEPA International and the Humanist Institute for Co-operation with Developing Countries (HIVOS) will organise an expert meeting on the abandonment of female genital mutilation (FGM). This event will be supported by the National Committee for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development (NCDO). Hon. Kathleen Ferrier, MP and Head of the Netherlands AWEPA Section, will host the meeting. It will take place at the Dutch House of Representatives in The Hague on the 19th of June 2012.

During the meeting, information will be shared on the causes and consequences of the practise for many girls and women. FGM violates their basic human rights and seriously compromises their health. The practice has deep psychological effects too, which results in broader social and development implications. In addition, participants will look at initiatives that can be taken by Dutch parliamentarians in order to support FGM abandonment.

Background

Worldwide between 100 and 140 million women are suffering the consequences of FGM. In Africa only, it is estimated that more than 90 million girls from 10 years of age and above have undergone FGM, and, in some countries, over 95 per cent of women have been subject to some form of genital mutilation or cuttingⁱ.

In Africa, the practice of FGM is widespread, affecting as many as 28 countries. In some of these countries, prevalence rates are very high, such as in Mali where 85 % of women between 15-49 are mutilated or in Burkina Faso where the rate approaches 75%. Similar or even higher FGM prevalence are observed in Northern and Eastern Africa. However, FGM is not only an African problem. Recent studies show that it is also practiced in the majority of Middle Eastern countries. In all these societies FGM remains still very much taboo, thus breaking the silence on its destructive effects is essential to stop this gross violation of women's rights.

Europe and other western countries are directly affected by the practice within their Diaspora communities. The European Parliament has estimated that today 500 thousand girls and women living in Europe are suffering the lifelong consequences of FGM, while 180 thousand girls are at risk of mutilation every yearⁱⁱ.

Internationally, the practice is considered a fundamental violation of human rights and a form of discrimination and violence against women and girls. As of today specific criminal legislation

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prohibiting FGM has been adopted in some 20 African and 11 European countries. In many other countries, FGM is prosecutable under general criminal legislation.

However, legislation is not enough. FGM is a deeply-rooted cultural tradition that is difficult to change. It's criminalisation, which is certainly important, raises delicate issues of concern, as it is often the victim's very own family members (mothers, aunts, grand-mothers, etc.) that are also the perpetrators. This makes the infliction of sanctions particularly complex and a strict application of the legislation is often difficult.

To successfully promote FGM abandonment, legislation and repression must be accompanied by strong effort of information, sensitisation and education within the communities that widely practice FGM and support measures for victims. Awareness-raising must take place at all levels, from traditional chiefs to religious leaders, to women and youth organisations, elected officials and the government.

Meeting objectives

- To raise awareness and revive the political debate among policy makers, parliamentarians and diplomats about the abandonment of FGM.
- To stimulate Dutch MPs to support the abandonment of FGM nationally and/or internationally.
- To increase interaction between NGOs, CSOs and Dutch MPs on the issue of FGM.

ⁱ For more information see UNFPA's FAQ on FGM/C, available at <http://www.unfpa.org/gender/practices2.htm#13>

ⁱⁱ See www.endfgm.eu/en/

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