



35,000 Soroptimists demand: There must be zero tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation

It has been more than ten years since the United Nations adopted February 6th as International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation and yet 3 million girls are still subjected to this brutal practice every year. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an astonishing 140 million women in the world today are living with the consequences of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which include lifelong injuries, obstructions in childbirth and increased risk of new-born death, as well as grave psychological harm.¹ The 35,000 professional women who make up Soroptimist International of Europe decry this practice for its physical and psychological brutality and stand united in demanding zero tolerance towards FGM.

Acting as a global voice for women, our members across 59 countries in Europe, the Middle East and Africa commend the legislation banning FGM that has been passed in recent years in a number of countries, particularly in Africa. Evidence shows, however, that the passing of legislation is often only the first step in the process of eliminating a harmful tradition. We therefore:

- Support the call launched by the United Nations' human rights experts to promote awareness of Violence Against Women and Girls and FGM specifically. The World Health Organization tells us that an astounding 101 million girls living in Africa today have been sexually mutilated.² In Europe an estimated 500,000 women and girls are suffering the lifelong consequences of genital mutilation.³ The education of men and women alike on the dangers of FGM and on the safeguarding of women's basic human rights must continue to be the work of international institutions, governments, and civil society alike.
- Repeat our call for the signing and ratification of the Istanbul Convention which has recognised FGM as a serious form of Violence Against Women and Girls. Moreover, we call on states where the practice continues to exist to pass legislation against it, and on states that have passed the relevant legislation to focus on its implementation and on the prosecution of perpetrators.
- Invite other members of civil society to collaborate with Soroptimist International of Europe in a comprehensive effort to end all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls including Female Genital Mutilation which, we believe, no tradition or culture can justify.

The members of Soroptimist International of Europe have been improving the lives of women and girls across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa for more than 90 years. We do so by putting in place thousands of practical projects that are identified, designed, and implemented locally by our members on the ground. To combat FGM, Soroptimist have in recent years:

- Raised funds for a childbirth clinic for genitally mutilated women and girls of the Afar Tribe in Ethiopia, which numbers 1.6 million people and which banned FGM in its tribal law in 2003.
- Provided access to reconstructive surgery to women having undergone FGM in Burkina Faso.
- Financed a shelter for women and girls in Tanzania who have escaped violence, including FGM.
- Supported an association in Burkina Faso dedicated to the prevention of FGM by funding the training of a social worker whose role it is to educate thousands of people in the rural areas on the dangers and negative health implications of FGM.
- Supported the education of the most vulnerable people in the most exposed regions of the world.

Soroptimist International of Europe and its 35,000 members hereby voice their firm and unequivocal stand against all forms of Violence Against Women, in general, and Female Genital Mutilation, in particular. We call for the full eradication of this form of violence, not only in the letter of the law but in practice as well, in all countries where it exists in the world.

For more information, please contact Soroptimist International of Europe Executive Director Anne Simon at anne.simon@soroptimisteurope.org

¹ World Health Organization. Feb 2013. *Female genital mutilation - Fact sheet N°241*. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

² Ibid.

³ Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. 6 Feb 2014. *A safe and just world for women and girls is one without female genital mutilation*. <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=4316&lang=2&cat=133>