



34,000 Soroptimists Demand Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation

Despite all the awareness-raising efforts since the United Nations adopted 6 February as International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in 2012, some 3 million girls are still subjected to this brutal practice every year. According to statistics published by UNICEF in September 2016, at least 200 million women and girls in the world today are living with the consequences of female genital mutilation, which include lifelong injuries, obstructions in childbirth and increased risk of infant deaths, as well as grave psychological harm.

As UN Women Deputy Executive Director Lakshmi Puri remarked at the US National Summit on Female Genital Mutilation on 2 December 2016 in Washington, eliminating FGM is an essential step to realising other Sustainable Development Goals. 'At UN Women, we believe that harmful practices such as FGM need to be treated through a holistic and comprehensive approach to all forms of violence, with a focus on prevention.'

The 34,000 women in business and professions across 62 countries in Europe, the Middle East, the Caribbean and Africa who make up Soroptimist International of Europe agree and stand united in demanding zero tolerance towards FGM. As a human rights issue, FGM is condemned by a number of international treaties and conventions. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that 'everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being', and as such, FGM/C violates the right to health and bodily integrity. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women can be invoked because FGM is clearly a case of violence against women and girls. As a form of torture it falls under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Moreover, since FGM is considered a traditional practice detrimental to the health of girls and is, in most instances, performed on minors, it violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

While Soroptimists welcome legislation banning FGM, evidence shows that laws are often only the first step in the process of eliminating this cruel tradition. We therefore:

- Support the education of men and women alike on the dangers of FGM and the call to safeguard women's basic human rights through the work of international institutions, governments and civil society.
- Call on all nations to sign and ratify the Istanbul Convention which identifies FGM as a serious form of violence against women and girls. Moreover, we appeal to those states where the practice is still condoned to pass legislation against it, and on states that have passed the relevant legislation to enforce its implementation and the prosecution of its perpetrators.
- Invite other members of civil society to join efforts to end all forms of violence against women and girls including female genital mutilation.

The Unions and Clubs of Soroptimist International of Europe have been improving the lives of women and girls for more than 90 years by implementing and/or funding thousands of practical projects. To combat FGM, for example, Soroptimists have:

- Raised funds for a childbirth clinic for genitally mutilated women and girls of the Afar Tribe in Ethiopia.
- 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.
- Liaised and networked with notable activists in the area, such as Dr. Ghada Hatem-Gantzer who will be attending the 2018 Governors' Meeting

In summary, Soroptimist International of Europe and its 34,000 members condemn all forms of violence against women, in general, and FGM, in particular. We call for the full eradication of this form of violence, not only in the letter of the law but also in practice, in all countries where it exists.

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