



INTER-REGIONAL COALITION TO END FGM

Joint Open Letter on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation

6 February 2019

To international, European, African, Asian and American decision-makers,

We, the undersigned Networks representing almost 200 organisations from four different regions, as well as millions of women and girls affected by or at risk of FGM, take the opportunity of the 6th of February, **International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation** (FGM) to draw your attention on the urgent need to scale up efforts to ending FGM.

According to UNICEF data, more than 200 million women and girls today are survivors of FGM¹. Moreover, a report released by UNFPA one year ago showed that if current FGM prevalence and population growth trends continue in the direction they are moving in, 68 million girls will face FGM between 2015 and 2030², unless massively scaled-up efforts are taken urgently to prevent that from happening. There is clearly no time to waste.

Despite this, in 2018, we experienced pushbacks in our respective regions around ending FGM in the name of cultural and religious justifications. In [Kenya](#), a petition was filed to rule the national FGM ban unconstitutional and discriminatory against “national heritage”. The [Malaysian](#) government officially defended the practice of FGM as a “cultural obligation” after being criticized during the Universal Periodic Review in Geneva by fellow states. In the [US](#), doctors who performed FGM on girls from the Dawoodi Bohra community are being defended in court in the name of “religious freedom”.

As we enter 2019, now more than ever the End FGM movement must strategically and collectively address these pushbacks in order to stand up strong against those who want to promote FGM. We cannot tolerate that FGM is justified or condoned in any region or any part of the world. We, as the Inter-Regional Coalition to end FGM are united with one voice. **Survivors and community members who are opposing the practice are at the heart of all our networks.** We are them, we work with them, our members work with them, and we are committed to amplifying their voices, placing them at the centre of debate and ensuring that they have access to international platforms to courageously speak out. Everyone, from civil society to professionals, from decision-makers to judges, must listen to them, support them, and put an end to FGM.

¹ Please find the report [here](#).

² Please read the report [here](#).



The only way to counter more and more widespread narratives condoning FGM is to listen to the very people who were affected by it. We are committed to do it. What about you?

We take the opportunity of this yearly anniversary to ask you to:

- i. Scale up financial resources to end FGM, and within this, ensure adequate mechanisms that support community engagement. Create funding schemes that are more flexible, to ensure structural longer-term sustainable support for community engagement and enable cross-continental bridge building projects that do away with the divide between domestic and cooperation programmes
- ii. Meaningfully engage FGM survivors and affected communities in policy and decision-making, service provision and other actions that directly impact them, in terms of shaping them according to their self-defined needs and priorities, and involving them throughout all phases of the process, not only as beneficiaries but as real actors;
- iii. Ensure that training modules for professionals at every level also stress the key role of communities in service provision and centre community engagement as a top priority and best practice, to better prevent FGM and protect affected women and girls.

Because if we don't involve the very people who are affected, we have already failed.

Signed

Fiona Coyle, Director, End FGM European Network

Dr. Morissanda Kouyate, Executive Director, Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC)

Gessen C. Rocas, Director, Strategic Partnership and External Relations, East and South East Asia Regional Office (IPPF-ESEAOR)

Dr. Ghada Khan, Network Coordinator, The US End FGM/C Network

Who we are:

The Inter-Regional Coalition to end Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a coalition of regional networks working to end FGM, representing almost 200 members in four regions of the world. Its main objective is to enable better coordination among civil society working towards the abandonment of FGM at different regional and sub-regional levels, fostering joint actions and sharing promising practices across regions, and providing a global unified civil society platform of expertise, including global trends and regional specificities, to influence inter-governmental bodies and decision-makers to shape global and regional policies to tackle FGM.