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**Handling the Issue of Female Genital  
Mutilation in Africa and Asia**

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**Forum:** Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM)

**Issue:** Handling the Issue of Female Genital Mutilation in Africa and Asia

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## **Introduction**

According to the World Health Organization genital mutilation is considered as "all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons." The difference between female circumcision and genital mutilation is that, circumcision is a medical process and is applied when necessary. Factors that lead to the application of female genital mutilation are socio-cultural. The tradition is passed through generations, in order to keep the females sexually "pure".

According to cultural beliefs in many societies across Africa and Asia, it is considered as limiting sexual desire from a young age and keeping the virginity of women, which is necessary to ensure marital fidelity. FGM (female genital mutilation) is practiced in 27 countries around Africa with 3 million girls in risk of undergoing FGM every year. Generally girls at age 15 undergo this practice. This practice has been applied to 300 million women worldwide. FGM can lead to many mental, physical and sexual disorders. The physical health consequences include severe bleeding and high tendency to infections, especially if the same tools are used on several individuals without disinfecting. Long-term effects include menstrual disorders, infertility, anemia and difficulty passing urine.

Women that undergo FGM face pain during sexual intercourse and have a higher risk of miscarriage. Victims of this implication can also face depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health issues. Women face these disorders and complications due to the borders their culture and society have.

Transcending these borders would have improved the lives of 300 million women and girls and still has the opportunity to save 3 million females from FGM this year in Africa. As years pass the number of females that have undergone female genital mutilation decreases.

## **General Overview**

The practice of female genital mutilation is common in 27 countries in Africa, in Asia it is practiced in some communities in Malaysia and Indonesia, Egypt, Yemen, and Iraqi Kurdistan. With the implementation of female genital mutilation, women and children rights are being violated, including their rights to health, physical integrity, being free from violence and being free from inhuman and violent actions.

Discrimination against women is observed through this action. Some countries have laws and legal framework regarding FGM. These countries are; Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Ghana, United Kingdom, Guinea, Sudan, Sweden, and the

United States of America. Keeping in mind that FGM is commonly seen in Africa and Asia, countries with regulations for this issue should increase.

This issue is mentioned in certain articles in international treaties, which are International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). These treaties contain obligations of countries to maintain the rights girls and women.

## Definition of Key Terms

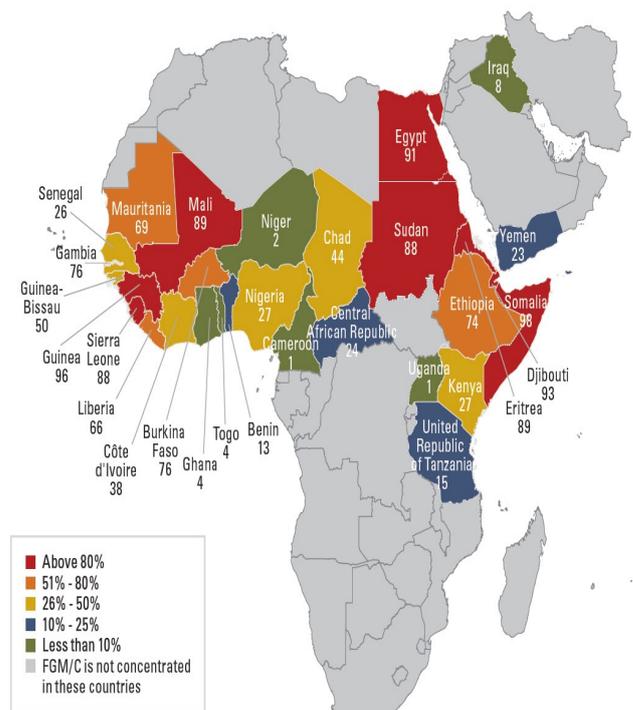
*WHO (World Health Organization):* WHO is an abbreviation for World Health Organization. The goal of WHO is stated as “To improve equity in health, reduce health risks, promote healthy lifestyles and settings, and respond to the underlying determinants of health.” WHO is an organization that contributes to the decrease of FGM around the world and it collaborated with many other bodies to minimize the practice of FGM, and increasing the knowledge about the practice.

*UNICEF:* UNICEF is an abbreviation for United Nations Children Fund. UNICEF represents and takes actions regarding the right, wellbeing and health of every child around the world. Since FGM is a violation of women and children rights they are deeply concerned with the issue. They have taken and still are taking actions regarding this practice.

*CEDAW:* CEDAW is an abbreviation for Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. This convention was adopted in 1979 by the UN in order to represent women and maintain their rights. It sets up agenda to prevent violation of women rights.

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

**Somalia:** According to WHO in 2005 an estimate of 97.9% females in Somalia have undergone FGM. From the research done by UNICEF in 2013, the number is decreased to 96%. Somalia has the highest percentage of type III FGM, with 79%. According to these researches, the rates dropped by 25% after a social campaign to raise awareness. However the implication of this action is still embedded in their culture. UNICEF is willing to take action regarding this topic, by supplying fund and education. However since this action is generally applied on girls that are between 0-14 years old, and with the low level of education in Somalia it is hard to achieve their goal. It is important to reduce both the supply and demand of FGM. Target groups are set to take action as soon as possible. As stated in the Federal Constitution of Somalia,



“Female circumcision is a cruel and degrading customary practice, and is tantamount to torture. The circumcision of girls is prohibited.” Even though circumcision and genital mutilation are not the same thing, it is also stated in the constitution that “Every person has the right to personal security, and this includes the prohibition of illegal detention, all forms of violence, including any form of violence against women, torture, or inhumane treatment.” Thus the Somalian government is aware of the urgent situation but cannot take measures on their own.

**Guinea:** According to a survey 96% of females aged between 14-49 have faced this action, making Guinea the second country with the highest rate of FGM in the world. Around 50% of women who have been victims of this procedure believe that it is a requirement of their religion. Even though the law states that FGM is prohibited, the action still takes place. According to the law, if the victim dies within 40 days, the imprecator has a penalty of life in prison or is sentenced to death. The government also contributed to the issue by getting help from religious leaders in the country. Guinea was the first country to take regulations against FGM.

**Egypt:** According to a research done by UNICEF, 91% of women have their genitals cut because of this procedure. The implication of all forms of FGM was banned by the Minister of Health and Population in 2007. The order of the Minister stated that “FGM is prohibited for any doctors, nurses, or any other person to carry out any cut of, flattening or modification of any natural part of the female reproductive system”. After this action a loophole was noticed regarding the allowance of girls to go through this procedure due to health reasons. In June 2007 this was banned as well. Many trials have been held due to this issue and there has been penalty of maximum two years in prison.

### **Timeline of Events**

<b>Date of Event</b>	<b>Description of Event</b>
<b>1965</b>	Guinea became the first country to adopt laws regarding FGM.
<b>1990</b>	In the charter for Children Rights and Welfare, an African chapter was created, calling up on states to take measures regarding FGM.
<b>1993</b>	FGM was considered as a human rights violation, according to the World Conference of Human Rights set in Vienna.
<b>1995</b>	Global Women Conference was set in Beijing. Sexual rights were recognized as human rights.
<b>1997</b>	Collaboration between WHO and UNICEF took place, with the aim for a greater recognition in the world on FGM. Resolutions were written regarding this issue. A legal framework was created, which included a law against FGM in 24 countries around Africa.
<b>2001</b>	A report was released by The European Parliament, recognizing FGM as a crime.
<b>2010</b>	A "Global strategy to stop health care providers from performing female genital mutilation" was published by WHO, with the contribution of other UN key agencies and international organizations.

2012	A resolution was adopted by the UN GA on the removal of FGM.
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## **Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

Countries with legal framework or consequences regarding this procedure include Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Ghana, United Kingdom, Guinea, Sudan, Sweden, and the United States. Canada, France and the United Kingdom also have laws regarding child abuse that cover FGM.

There are also governments that encourage FGM to completely be removed as a procedure. These countries are as follows; Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Niger, Senegal, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda.

Bodies like CEDAW have mentioned FGM in their reports and suggested specific actions for member states that can overcome FGM. UNICEF and WHO also played an important role on raising awareness to FGM.

## **Possible Solutions**

In order to be efficient, programs that contribute to eliminating female genital mutilation should be carried out by governments. Actions such as;

- Maintaining a strong and visible political view regarding the eradication of FGM.
- Developing a legal framework or regulations, including a law banning the practice of FGM to girls and women.
- Including FGM prevention techniques into programs and agreements that deal with reproductive health and education.
- Increase the education of the population living in rural areas; which will help trench the borders of the local people. The education should be accurate and easy to access. This way knowledge would be spreader to a greater population.
- Mustering communities to develop their own strategies in order to eliminate FGM.

## **Further Reading**

Below are two resources that can help to further understand the issue at hand.

- [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw52/statements\\_missions/Interagency\\_Statement\\_on\\_Eliminating\\_FGM.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw52/statements_missions/Interagency_Statement_on_Eliminating_FGM.pdf)
- [https://www.unicef.org/media/files/UNICEF\\_FGM\\_report\\_July\\_2013\\_Hi\\_res.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/UNICEF_FGM_report_July_2013_Hi_res.pdf)

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