



The Pre-session on the Republic of The Gambia will take place in Room XXIII of the Palais des Nations on Thursday, 21 November 2024 at 10:00

**Sexual and Gender Based Violence (Towards eradicating FGM/C in The Gambia)
by Fatou Baldeh, Dr. (hc), MBE, 2024 IWOC, 2024 IWRA
CEO & Founder - Women In Liberation and Leadership (WILL)**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to deliver a statement at the 48th Universal Periodic Review Pre-Session for The Gambia on the status of women and girls. I am presenting on behalf of Women In Liberation and Leadership (WILL), a women and survivor led organization focus on fighting Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in The Gambia. Today my contributions centers on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM) in The Gambia.

FGM which includes the part or total removal of the female genitalia is a common practice in The Gambia. 7 out of 10 women age 15-49 and 5 out of 10 girls age 0-14 years have undergone FGM/C in The Gambia. FGM is recognised globally as a form of gender-based violence. In 2016, the World Health Organisation reported on the Member States of the United Nations' declaration of "FGM/C as a violation of the human rights of girls and women, including every person's right to the highest attainable standard of health".

In The Gambia, the Women's Act (2015) introduced in 2015, declared all forms of FGM/C illegal. However, the Women's Act (2015) faced a real threat of revocation by a Bill tabled at the National Assembly of The Gambia in 2024, after three women were charged of breaking the law in August 2023.

Thanks to a vigorous campaign led by Civil Society Organisations, with support from both local and international partners, the BILL was not passed.

Although defeating the Bill that sought to revoke the Women's Act (2015) marked a major milestone in the campaign to eradicate FGM/C, girls and young women still face the risk of being cut. Additionally, there is great fear that the government will not enforce the law that bans FGM.

Sadly, despite the ban, our organization continue to receive cases of girls being

cut and where such cases are reported to the police, no actions are being taken towards perpetrators.

The harmful effects of FGM/C are well documented ranging from short-term effects, such as severe pain and injury to tissues, hemorrhage, shock, and in some instances even death to long-term complications such as obstetric complications (e.g., caesarean section, postpartum hemorrhage), chronic infections, and psychological effects, including PTSD. A recent study and consultations conducted by WILL, which informed the report submitted under this review, found all the above complications to exist in The Gambia. Women who took part in these consultations across the country also reported deaths of infants and young girls as a result of FGM as well as most of these complications associated with FGM. FGM therefore continues to affect Gambian women and girls' mental and physical health and as such their right to the highest attainable standard of health. Additionally, FGM is closely linked to child marriage and affects girls' and women's' opportunities and development, and hinders global efforts to achieve gender equity and equality.

In view of the above, the following recommendations are presented to The Government of The Gambia;

1. The Women's ACT (2015) of The Gambia should be fully and effectively enforced with full support from all arms of the Government of The Gambia.
2. The National Assembly, the judiciary, law enforcement, the press, CSOs, community organisations, international development partners and all other stakeholders should work together to develop a robust policy and legal framework and action plan to eradicate FGM in The Gambia.
3. More advocacy, practical interventions and studies should be carried out to raise awareness on the harmful effects of FGM/C and accelerate its eradication. The campaign should target more men and incorporate positive masculinity, centering communities at the heart of all campaigns
4. The government through the ministry of basic education should introduce a gender transformative Education system which should aim to transform social norms, power dynamics and raise critical thinking and awareness on the root causes of inequality and oppression among children and young people in order to tackle inequalities.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Civil Society Organisations that took part in the campaign to defeat the Women's Bill that was proposed to revoke the ban on FGM/C, the National Assembly Members and government officials who supported the ban, and our international partners who supported us at a critical moment for the welfare of girls and women of The Gambia.

Thank You!