

ENCOURAGING THE FIGHT AGAINST FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

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On this International Women Day, I am showing my support by joining the fight against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) which is a human right violation.

What You Need To Know:

Female genital mutilation, also known as female genital cutting or FGM, is the practice of intentionally cutting or altering the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. In most societies where FGM happens, it is seen as a cultural tradition and is deeply rooted in inequality between the sexes.

Each year the United Nations observes February 6th as the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation. The theme for the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM in 2016 is was "Achieving the new Global Goals through the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation by 2030," in recognition of the need to advance the health and human rights of women and girls in order to meet the new Sustainable Development Goals.

Together, we can stop this human rights tragedy and support victims of FGM.

Here's what you need to know and what actions you can take to help stop it:

An estimated 125 to 140 million women and girls are victims of FGM:

Despite FGM being classified as a human rights violation by the World Health Organization, it still happens to thousands of vulnerable women and girls every single day.

Globally, a woman or girl is violated by FGM every ten seconds:

This means approximately 8,500 women and girls are harmed by FGM daily.

Most girls undergo FGM between infancy and the age of 15: FGM has existed for over 2,000 years and is performed on women days before their marriages, or on babies as young as a few days old.

The procedure has no health benefits for women and girls:

FGM can cause severe pain, infertility, infection, and prolonged bleeding. It can also cause complications during childbirth and increases the risk of newborn deaths. The practice of FGM can also cause behavioral changes in women and girls and lifelong psychological damage.

Complications are common and often lead to death:

Women that undergo the procedure are twice as likely to die during childbirth.

FGM is often seen as a tradition in raising a girl properly:

Communities practice FGM mostly for cultural reasons. Since it is such a powerful social norm, most families will have their daughters cut despite the health risks and harm. FGM is practiced under the belief that women and girls will remain pure and ensure a proper marriage.

The practice of FGM is most common in Middle Eastern and African countries.

Though FGM is a universal problem that happens all over the world, it is primarily concentrated in 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East. In Egypt and Ethiopia, nearly half of the female population are survivors of FGM.

Procedures:

Female genital mutilation is classified into 4 major types.

- **Type 1:** Often referred to as clitoridectomy: This is the partial or total removal of the clitoris (a small, sensitive and erectile part of the female genitals), and in very rare cases, only the prepuce (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris).

- **Type 2:** Often referred to as excision: This is the partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora (the inner folds of the vulva), with or without excision of the labia majora (the outer folds of skin of the vulva).

- **Type 3:** Often referred to as infibulation: This is the narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the labia minora, or labia majora, sometimes through stitching, with or without removal of the clitoris (clitoridectomy).

- **Type 4:** This includes all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area.

Deinfibulation refers to the practice of cutting open the sealed vaginal opening in a woman who has been infibulated, which is often necessary for improving health and well-being as well as to allow intercourse or to facilitate childbirth.

No health benefits, only harm: FGM has no health benefits, and it harms girls and women in many ways. It involves removing and damaging healthy and normal female genital tissue, and interferes with the natural functions of girls' and women's bodies. Generally speaking, risks increase with increasing severity of the procedure.

Immediate complications can include:

- severe pain
- excessive bleeding (haemorrhage)
- genital tissue swelling
- fever
- infections e.g., tetanus
- urinary problems
- wound healing problems
- injury to surrounding genital tissue
- shock
- death.

Long-term consequences can include:

- urinary problems (painful urination, urinary tract infections);
- vaginal problems (discharge, itching, bacterial vaginosis and other infections);
- menstrual problems (painful menstruations, difficulty in passing menstrual blood, etc.);
- scar tissue and keloid;
- sexual problems (pain during intercourse, decreased satisfaction, etc.);
- increased risk of childbirth complications (difficult delivery, excessive bleeding, caesarean section, need to resuscitate the baby, etc.) and newborn deaths;
- need for later surgeries: for example, the FGM procedure that seals or narrows a vaginal opening (type 3) needs to be cut open later to allow for sexual intercourse and childbirth (deinfibulation). Sometimes genital tissue is stitched again several times, including after childbirth, hence the woman goes through repeated opening and closing procedures, further increasing both immediate and long-term risks;
- psychological problems (depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, low self-esteem, etc.).

I stand on equality for women, progress for all initiative and also encourage women to adopt the mentality of “Don’t play by the game of inequality, but change the game. I know you can, I know you will, and I am sure you will not allow your rights be violated by abhorrent, hateful and despicable beyond the pale cultural believe system.

Let’s all Join the fight to help stop Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) around the globe, especially in Africa.

Happy International Women Day.

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