

Symposium on Female Genital Cutting (FGC)
1st Anniversary of the International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGC
Feb. 6, 2004

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[Handwritten notes transcribed by the Population Reference Bureau]

I would like to start my presentation by thanking all of you who are celebrating Feb. 6 today with the IAC. Today in the U.S., and with some time differences, there are celebrations all over the globe. Yes, we are celebrating our success in the 28 African countries where IAC has committees (and where FGC can be found) and also in Europe, Japan, New Zealand, and the U.S.A.

On behalf of the Ms. Berhane Ras Work, the Head of the InterAfrican Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC), I would like to thank the USAID, Global Bureau for Health for making possible this celebration of the 1st Anniversary of Zero Tolerance Day to FGC.

The InterAfrican Committee is the largest African network fighting female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices. Created in 1984 at a seminar in Dakar, it started with xx African countries. Today our organization has national committees in 28 African countries and Affiliates in 7 European countries, Japan and New Zealand. Its headquarters is Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) near (.in association with..) the ECA UN – Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union formerly the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The IAC has a liaison office in Geneva, consultative status with ECOSOC, and observer status with xx – WHO.

The mandate of the IAC is to reduce the morbidity and mortality rates of women and children through the eradication of FGC and other harmful traditional practices. The main activities of the IAC are

- Advocacy and lobbying at all levels of the community, including religious leaders and policymakers.
- Training of trainers, having peers with excisors, youth, women and others
- Legislation: our anti-FGC law was voted in 13 African countries and in European parliament; an additional protocol on African women's rights was adopted by the heads of state last year in Maputu, of which the IAC played a very active role in the whole process.
- Research (operations research) and research on behavior and attitude changes
- Production of training materials, films, dramas, and other media events addressing women's human and reproductive rights
- Educating medical personal to avoid "medicalization" of this practice;
- Identification and collaboration with religious leaders in order to have the position of Islam on the issue of FGC

What is FGC?

All societies have norms of care and behaviour based on age, life, stage, gender and social class. These norms are often referred to as traditional practices may be beneficial or harmless, but some may be harmful such as FGC or FGM. FGM is defined by the WHO as all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural or other nontherapeutic reasons. Those procedures are irreversible and their very harmful effects, which damage the physical and mental health of women and girls, last a lifetime.

The first Zero Tolerance Conference was held in Addis Ababa from 4-6 February of last year. It gathered over 400 participants from Africa, Europe, Canada, the USA and Japan. “Zero Tolerance” means no one should be indifferent to, nor tolerate FGM whatever the type, justification, and place where practiced.

The achievements of the first Zero Tolerance Conference were:

- To provide an occasion to launch our Appeal to African Heads of State to adopt Zero Tolerance to FGM
- To declare Feb. 6th of every year as International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM
- Adoption of a **Common Agenda for Action** against FGM by all stakeholdersand for that a multisectoral approach is needed through joint action from the bottom to the top and the top to the bottom (or the community to decisionmakers and vice versa) and;
- The most important and powerful action was the adoption by the UN and the xxx of the Declaration of Zero Tolerance to FGM across the African continent last year through resolutions.

Programs:

With the Goal of advocating against FGM and other HTPs while promoting beneficial practices, IAC has the following programs:

Research and publications

Training, Information and Sensitization

Advocacy

Alternative Employment Opportunities (AEO) for ex-circumcisers (FGM performers)

Developing behaviour change communication materials

What is the Common Agenda for Action against FGM?

- A forward-looking strategy with the goal of eradicating FGM in Africa and the rest of the world by 2010.
- A detailed document to move the process of FGM eradication forward through a collective effort between 2003 and 2010; and
- Involves all stakeholders having genuine interest in FGM issues.

Objectives of the Common Agenda:

To determine the extent and nature of FGM in order to design effective intervention through conducting Operational Research

- To produce appropriate behaviour change communication materials that address the issue of FGM
- To conduct training and information campaigns for specific target groups
- To organize special programs for Religious leaders;
- To involve youth in the FGM eradication process;
- To conduct training programs for Media professionals;
- To re-orient health personnel to stop FGM
- To establish Alternative Employment Opportunity for ex-circumcisers
- To conduct advocacy with policymakers and facilitate legislative measures against FGM
- To collaborate with relevant government departments: WHO, UN agencies and others to adopt an integrated approach to FGM eradication.

Common Agenda – the BIG picture (content)

- Situation Analysis of FGM globally
- Relevance of FGM eradication to the Millennium Development Goals (UN Declaration), e.g., promotion of gender equality and empowerment; reducing infant mortality, and improvement of maternal health

Who are the stakeholders?

- IAC
- United Nations Development System
- African Union
- European Union
- Governments in Europe, Africa, America, Oceania, Asia,
- Donors: DFID, DANIDA, GTZ, NORAD, USAID, Etc.
- International Organizations of Francophone Africa
- Parliaments and International NGOs
- Socio-professional associations
- Association of Africans in Diaspora
- Religious denominations
- Traditional Associations

Conclusion

With a concerted effort and an integrated approach, the goal of eradication FGM is feasible.

Together, WE can build

Thank you