

Beat: Lifestyle

UN URGES SHIFT IN FOCUS FROM FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION TO GIRLS EDUCATION

TO END HARMFUL PRACTICE BY 2030

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USPA NEWS - Following are United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks at the Special Event on Mobilizing to Achieve the Global Goals through the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) by 2030, in New York today :

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Thank you to our moderator, Femi Oke. I am proud to be among so many champions in the cause of eliminating female genital mutilation. This is more than a mobilization; it is a celebration of women's empowerment. On this Day, I call for help to communities where female genital mutilation is practised "" because they are working for change.

We see examples in this room and around the world. One Ethiopian woman who used to perform female genital mutilation said she 'will never, ever think of subjecting [another] girl to the harm and suffering' it causes. Now she campaigns with us.

Today I am pleased to launch this powerful new international symbol on female genital mutilation. It reminds us of the millions of girls and women that have experienced female genital mutilation and it serves as a call to action to end this harmful practice. This will be our banner going forward as we show our commitment to eliminating female genital mutilation by 2030.

In my time as Secretary-General, you have helped achieve impressive results. In my first year, 2007, we held a first-of-its-kind global consultation on female genital mutilation. Experts took a hard look at the problem and came up with effective solutions. The next year, 2008, 10 United Nations agencies signed a statement on eliminating female genital mutilation. The Commission on the Status of Women and the World Health Assembly also took action.

At the same time, we launched the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Joint Programme to help communities quickly abandon this practice. In 2009, my report to the General Assembly on the girl child called for social change to drive female genital mutilation abandonment.

The next year, we established a global strategy against harmful medicalization. I also launched my 'Every Woman Every Child' movement which has mobilized partners who are getting concrete results.

By 2011, the African Union led the way in calling for a General Assembly resolution to eliminate female genital mutilation. By 2012, we got that landmark measure, which established this International Day. In 2013, we issued a report showing the difference that the UNFPA/UNICEF Joint Programme is making, and the Human Rights Council called for a high-level panel on female genital mutilation.

Last year, leaders committed to ending female genital mutilation through the Sustainable Development Goals. The Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health also supports this effort. Over the last 10 years, budgeting for this issue increased by 600 per cent. Even more important than raising funds, all of you are changing mindsets. I have been fortunate to meet with diaspora activists making a difference.

Since 2007, more than a dozen countries have enacted measures to tackle female genital mutilation. More than 950 legal cases have been prosecuted. And today, nearly all countries where it is prevalent outlaw the practice. We are working to extend that legal protection everywhere.

More than 110,000 doctors, nurses and midwives have received training on the issue. The number of women benefiting from valuable

services supported by the Joint Programme more than doubled over the past year to over 820,000. And more than 15,000 communities where some 12 million people live are committed to ending female genital mutilation.

I thank the many religious leaders joining this cause. More and more men and boys are speaking out. Somali Men Against FGM has its own Facebook page. One wrote: 'We say collectively: Don't Do it FOR US'. I salute these outspoken men. I also thank our partners in the media, such as the Guardian and many others, for their outstanding coverage and support.

I am especially inspired by communities that find better ways to mark the rite of passage into womanhood. Thousands of girls have benefited from these alternative rites of passage. In Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania, instead of being mutilated, young girls spend a week away from their families to learn life-skills. Where there used to be suffering, now there is strength.

Let us continue our campaign to empower these girls and so many others. Let us shift the focus away from mutilation to education. Let us make a world where FGM stands for Focus on Girls' Minds. How about this: FGM stands for Focus on Girls Minds.

In this way, we will create conditions where, as one non-governmental organization rightly says, Finally Girls Matter. These empowered girls and women will help build a new future for all.

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