

Statement on the International Day Against Female Genital Mutilation

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Today, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, joins people around the world in calling for an end to female genital mutilation or cutting.

An estimated 120 to 140 million women have been subjected to the practice and 3 million girls continue to be at risk each year. The practice violates the basic rights of women and girls and seriously compromises their health, posing risks during childbirth, and leaving lasting physical and psychological scars.

Contrary to popular belief, female genital mutilation or cutting is not required by any religion. In fact, many religious leaders and scholars and faith-based organizations from around the world have called for the practice to be banned.

In more than a dozen countries where the practice is widespread, laws have been passed to make female genital mutilation illegal. And thanks to rising awareness, an increasing number of women, men and young people now disapprove of the practice. We even witness a reduction in prevalence in several countries, such as Kenya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali and Nigeria.

Today, UNFPA calls for stronger government commitment to fund and implement programmes to prevent female genital mutilation or cutting. At UNFPA, we have learned that to make greater progress, laws need to be enforced, people need to be educated, and communities must be engaged. We are guided by the knowledge that social change cannot be imposed from the outside. It needs to be supported from within the community. Through interventions that foster dialogue, an increasing number of communities have fully or partially abandoned the practice in favour of alternative initiation ceremonies, which is a positive trend.

Nonetheless, there are new emerging concerns arising from increased awareness of the associated health risks that need to be addressed if progress is to be sustained. They include medicalization of the practice as more and more parents try to minimize health hazards by turning to health-care providers to perform the cutting. There is also a trend of subjecting younger and younger girls to the practice to avoid their complaints or refusal to participate. And we also see some communities performing lesser cuts rather than abandoning the practice altogether.

Today, as we commemorate the International Day against Female Genital Mutilation, UNFPA calls for intensified efforts to stop the practice in all its forms. And we pledge to increase support for efforts to prevent female genital mutilation or cutting, and advance gender equality and human rights, including the right to sexual and reproductive health.

Source: <http://www.unfpa.org/>