



6 February 2014 - Female Genital Mutilation, or FGM, is one of the most harmful practices on earth today.

Three million girls are mutilated each year, according to estimates by UNFPA, and a majority of them are under 15 years old. The consequences vary from excruciating pain, infections or incontinence to psychological damage and, in the worst cases, death as a result of blood loss.

“There is no developmental, religious or health reason to cut or mutilate any girl or woman”, UN Secretary-General says in his message on the [International Day of Zero Tolerance against Female Genital Mutilation](#). “Although some would argue that this is a ‘tradition,’ we must recall that slavery, so-called honour killings and other inhumane practices have been defended with the same weak argument”, Ban says in his statement. “Just because a harmful practice has long existed does not justify its continuation. All ‘traditions’ that demean, dehumanize and injure are human rights violations that must be actively opposed until they are ended.”

The practice is declining in almost all countries but it is still frighteningly widespread. Although firm statistics are difficult to obtain, it is estimated that more than 125 million girls and women alive today have been cut in 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East, where FGM is most

prevalent and data exist. If current trends continue, some 86 million young girls worldwide are likely to experience some form of the practice by 2030. Asia, Europe, North America and other regions are not spared and must be equally vigilant in addressing the problem.

[According to](#) the "End FGM in Europe"-campaign and Amnesty, each year, 180,000 girls and women in Europe are estimated to be at risk of FGM.

The United Nations and our partners are engaged in valuable, culturally sensitive activities that aim to stop FGM without scolding or shame. In addition to prevention, the United Nations is working with partners to help those who have been affected by FGM. Pioneering medical advances now allow doctors to repair women's bodies and restore their health.

“In Sudan, we are seeing social change from a campaign called “Saleema,” the Arabic word that implies complete, intact, whole and untouched. One father moved by the effort who decided to leave his daughters uncut explained simply, “A girl is born Saleema, so leave her Saleema.” Hundreds of communities have embraced this initiative, expressing their support through songs, poetry and clothes in the campaign’s trademark bright colour”, Ban says in his statement. “Other countries are emulating Saleema or coming up with solutions tailored to their local needs, such as Kenya, where Meru community elders have prohibited FGM and vow to impose a fine on anyone who conducts or abets the practice.”

"There is no developmental, religious or health reason to cut or mutilate any girl or woman", Ban concludes.

*UNRIC's related links:*

*UNFPA on FGM:* <http://www.unfpa.org/topics/genderissues/fgm>

*WHO factsheet:* <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

*UNICEF statistical overview:* [http://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGCM\\_Lo\\_res.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGCM_Lo_res.pdf)

**“Preserve the best in culture, leave harm behind”**

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