

FEMALE INTEGRITY
END FGM EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN
PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**SWEDEN should engage with African nations to combat
Female Genital Mutilation**

On the eve of International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women, which also marks the first anniversary of the National Action Plan on female genital mutilation (FGM) in Sweden, Female Integrity calls upon the appropriate authorities of the State to **engage with African nations at the upcoming International conference and protect the rights of young women and girls** who are subjected to, or are at risk of, female genital mutilation (FGM) at home and abroad.

As a partner of the END FGM European Campaign, Female Integrity urges the State authorities to adopt a comprehensive approach to prevent FGM and protect prospective victims against FGM. As a signatory to several international instruments including CEDAW, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention against Torture, Sweden needs to stand up against female genital mutilation, which is a human rights violation that discriminates against young girls and amounts to torture.

To mark this important day, November 25, Amnesty International Swedish section, Female Integrity, RISK and EU-Commission in Sweden has arranged a seminar on that day from 09:15 – 11:30 in Europahuset, Regeringsgatan 65. The seminar is open to all interested.

In Sweden, National Action Plan to prevent and eliminate female genital mutilation has been carried out in 2003-2005. In 2008 some NGO's working to eliminate FGM tried to contact the appropriate authorities for working out a new National Action Plan. Unfortunately they were unable to get anything concrete.

The European Parliament estimates 500,000 girls and women living in Europe have been subjected to FGM. Another 180,000 women and girls living in Europe are at risk of being mutilated each year. In Sweden there are about 28,000 women who were born in Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia and Somalia. About 12,000 of these are under 18 years of age of whom about 5,000 are in the risk zone as being under the age of 7. (SCB, 2004).

While prevalence rates of FGM in African states are widely available, there is a knowledge gap in Europe. Using the International Conference 'Uniting Europe and Africa to fight Female Genital Mutilation' in The Hague on 25 November, Female Integrity and END FGM Campaign call on Sweden to **exchange best practices with its African counterparts to initiate data collection on the prevalence of FGM in**

Europe. “Without data, the issue will remain overlooked, the scale of the problem will be unknown and progress towards ending female genital mutilation will be limited”, said Dr Christine Loudes, Director, END FGM European Campaign.

It has been found that girls living in Europe, including Sweden, are taken to their countries of origin during school holidays where they are mutilated. Female Integrity and END FGM Campaign call on Sweden to **prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against women - including FGM**, taking place within or outside the country. **Cross border cooperation should be facilitated between European and African states.**

Within the country, girls at risk can be protected through development of protocols and guidelines as well as training of health and education professionals.

Sweden is expected and fully urged to use this landmark day to stand up to its commitments to combat violence against women by engaging with community actors and supporting them to end female genital mutilation.

Background information:

Female genital mutilation is a human rights violation in which part or all of the genitals of young girls generally below 15 years are pricked, cut or removed, usually without anaesthesia. The consequences include, but are not limited to, increased risks of HIV and infertility, chronic urinary and menstrual problems and complications during childbirth. FGM is a form of violence against women that is recognised internationally as a human rights violation.

Female Integrity will join a representative of Sweden at the International Conference ‘Uniting Europe and Africa to fight Female Genital Mutilation’ organised by the Dutch government on 25 November 2009. This conference will be attended by representatives of European and African states who will exchange good practices and learn from their combat against FGM.

END FGM European Campaign aims to put female genital mutilation on the political agenda in Europe and to echo the voices of women and girls who have been subjected to, or are at risk of, FGM. For more information, go to: www.endfgm.eu

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