

Press statement

Sunday 6th February, 2022

As we commemorate another day of Zero Tolerance to End Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting (FGM) with the Theme: “Accelerating Investment to End Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting” Scheduled for February 6th 2022 the Forum Against Harmful Practices (FAHP), Sierra Leone, joins the global voices calling for the total abandonment of FGM/C for all women and girls.

FGM is a human rights issue and a violation of a woman’s right to bodily integrity. The practice has no health benefit and leads to a range of physical and mental health challenges for women and girls that can last for a lifetime, and even cause death. The death of 21 year old Maseray Sei as a result of FGM in December 20th 2021 shows us that age is no protection against these harms. FGM also has an economic cost for families and the country. WHO estimates that FGM caused medical complications and has an economic cost of \$8.7m in Sierra Leone per year.

83% women and girls aged 15-49 have undergone FGM in Sierra Leone (DHS 2019). The Government of Sierra Leone, has ratified the Maputo Protocol without reservation and a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Sustainable Development Goals. This positions the Government of Sierra Leone under obligation to take responsibility to safeguard girls and women’s human rights and protect their health. The Government has also facilitated the development of a National Strategy for the reduction of FGM in Sierra Leone but has never been approved or implemented.

The Forum Against Harmful Practices (FAHP) is a coalition of 21 Civil Society Organizations. Together we are using consultations and discussion with stakeholders across Sierra Leone to understand all shades of opinion – including from government, Parliamentarians, Paramount Chiefs, Religious leaders, the media, Initiators (SOWEIS), parents and school girls and boys. We support an amicable approach to end FGM.

Key challenges to end FGM are the enablers who support FGM either for personal benefit or for social reasons. Among these are political leaders and Members of Parliament supporting FGM activities to gain votes, Soweis – for whom FGM is a source of income, paramount chiefs – who gain income from providing licenses to Soweis, and Civil Society Organizations in support of tradition and culture. These challenges can be overcome, if all these enablers support FAHP to promote the Alternative Rite of Passage (ART) and end FGM within the Bondo Society

FAHP is calling on:

1. All stakeholders to recognize FGM/C as a form of violence against women and girls
2. the Government to:
 - Review, approve and implement the draft National Strategy on FGM
 - To shift their stances from 'age of consent' to total abandonment and a ban on FGM
 - include commitments to end FGM in all relevant gender, education and health policies and strategies
3. Political parties, MPs and aspiring candidates to:
 - make manifesto commitments to introduce legislation against FGM for all women and girls in Sierra Leone
 - refrain from using FGM as a political tool and sponsoring FGM as a campaign tool
4. Donors to invest financial and technical resources in the nationally led movement to end the practice and the fight to end FGM/C
5. Traditional and religious leaders, and the media to champion the campaign against FGM/C and promote Alternative Rites of Passage

