

PRESS RELEASE

July 19, 2024

WADEMOS CONGRATULATES PARLIAMENT OF THE GAMBIA FOR UPHOLDING BAN ON FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)

The WADEMOS Network, a network of over 35 pro-democracy national and regional-level CSOs across the ECOWAS subregion, greatly lauds the rejection of the bill seeking to lift the ban on female genital mutilation (FGM) by the parliament in The Gambia.

We celebrate this as a demonstration of the resilience and commitment to the promotion and defense of human rights in The Gambia. The Network acknowledges the significant contribution of civil society and human rights groups in The Gambia and across the international community to the success of this commendable endeavor. Owing to this show of courage, the right of young girls and women across The Gambia to self-determination has been validated, and they stand a greater chance of a better quality of life.

The Women's Act of 2015, which criminalizes and assigns penalties for performing, aiding, and abetting the practice of FGM, stands as a testament to the dignity and agency of Gambian women and the untenable hurdles of their daily struggle. It stands as an appealing legacy of a turbulent era in Gambian history, one that was marked by oppression and authoritarianism. Without a doubt, the repeal of this ban would have been a massive indictment on The Gambia's relatively stable democracy. It is imperative, as it is conclusive, that, in this critical instance, democracy vindicated itself.

However, this attempt to roll back the progress of women does signal a more deeply engrained challenge in the country. The limited extent to which the ban has been applied following its adoption is of great concern and highlights the obstacles confronting the eradication of the FGM menace across Africa. Since the practice was criminalized in The Gambia in 2015, only two cases of FGM have been prosecuted, the first of which triggered the massive upheaval and the bid to get the ban revoked. It suggests that culture and attitudes in The Gambia are yet to be reformed and acquainted with the insensitivity and adverse impact of the practice.

Given that this inhumane practice has been individually inflicted on 75% of women in The Gambia, it is apparent to the Network that there exists a considerable gap in Gambian society when it comes to the appreciation of the rights and agency of women, including their right to health, safety and security. There is a need for a massive civic education campaign to drive home the detrimental effects of FGM and the unfair toll it takes on young girls and women psychologically, emotionally, and physically.

Building on this landmark decision in the parliament, we urge Gambian authorities to focus more on enforcing the law. We also call on civil society, human rights organizations, and the international community to rise to the occasion to protect the women of The Gambia in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against

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Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which The Gambia is a signatory.

We call on the AU and ECOWAS to lend their support to enforcing the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which specifically states that governments must take all appropriate measures to eliminate harmful social and cultural practices, including FGM.

It is the fervent wish of the Network that the hope that comes with this remarkable victory will reverberate across the entire sub-region and the continent of Africa, and it will precipitate the abolition of all socio-cultural norms and practices that are harmful to women, including domestic violence, FGM, and child marriage, which have recently been outlawed in Sierra Leone.

The safety and security of women remain indispensable to the dream of an equal and progressive society—a society that provides optimal opportunities for advancement to people of all tribes, nations, and ethnicities in the subregion. The Network remains committed to ensuring that in the transition from an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of Peoples, the interests of women are not overlooked or relegated to the background, but rather safeguarded, prioritized, and cherished.

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About WADEMOS

WADEMOS is an independent and a non-partisan network of diverse national and transnational civil society organizations and civic groups working to promote and defend democracy, good governance and inclusive development in the West Africa region. WADEMOS mobilizes, coordinates, and leverages the collective voice and power of civil society and other pro-democracy actors, resources, and opportunities within the West Africa region to advance its mission. The current membership of WADEMOS stands at 47 spread across West Africa. The WADEMOS Secretariat is based in Accra, Ghana.

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