

Dear Friends and Activists,

after a full day of profound discussions and constructive exchange I am convinced that together we can stop Female Genital Mutilation in Europe and beyond. Our mandate is given on various levels like international conventions and resolutions but our motivation is driven by the painful experience of millions of women. Our activities are formed by the insight that besides state and organisational activities every single person from an FGM-performing community can be a major force in the abandonment of this human rights violation. Knowledge, an opposing attitude and the transformation of these into activities can change a social norm.

That's why we named our project "Change". CHANGE stands for support of activists within practicing communities by training, networking and by backing our multipliers when they experience rejection for breaking the taboo of FGM.

Gender-based violence is a form of discrimination and a violation of fundamental rights. We have to protect women and children from gender-based violence through legislation and practical measures on victims' rights.

To prevent FGM it is important to strengthen the laws, develop regulations on policy level, train key professionals on legal and health aspect, and educate communities on intervention strategies to support social change towards combating FGM. With the change project we focused on the community, their members resources, competences and ideas.

Orientating on the European Commission's "Strategy towards the elimination of FGM" I'd like to summarise on the topic of ending FGM in Europe and beyond under these three aspects:

1. Legal and Health Aspects
2. Policy Level
3. Community Needs and Intervention Strategies

These plus "Evaluating Social Change" were discussed earlier at the round tables, too and I'd like to thank all speakers and panellists for their contributions and for sharing their experience with us!

Legal Let me start with the legal aspect:

It took 15 years from the first demands and continuing lobbying by TERRE DES FEMMES

to get to the day the German parliament decided to pass a law to protect girls from Female Genital Mutilation and it took another year to include mutilations done in foreign states. Germany followed several other states in the European Union like Spain, UK, France, Italy and the Scandinavian states but there are still countries who didn't legislate FGM specifically.

There have been only very few trials in Europe but having an explicit prohibition of FGM sends a clear signal to the proponents of this practice and empowers daughters with the possibility to turn to a higher authority to prevent being hurt. It also helps key professionals, neighbours and others to understand that FGM is a crime, not a family matter.

Besides the implementation of a criminal law against female genital mutilation asylum law is another important issue in Europe most times. The member states need to protect women and girls under the threat of mutilation equally regardless of their place of birth and ancestry. I elaborated on this when I was presenting the summary of our round table discussion so I'll continue to the health issues now:

Recognizing FGM as a form of violence against women makes it necessary to offer help to the affected women. TERRE DES FEMMES and others therefore included the four forms of FGM in the German ICD – a code used for diagnosis by doctors and as a tool to calculate expenses of treatment. Naming FGM here ensures in the long run that the women affected get better treatment by full coverage of the costs by health insurances. In Germany this also includes opening and reconstructive surgeries.

The supply of medical support for survivors of FGM is still very limited throughout Europe. In some medical schools FGM is already taught and a growing number of professionals is interested in learning more about FGM but there are very few specialists compared to the amount of women affected. We encourage students to aim at supporting FGM survivors in their future jobs, we support medical unions and associations to lecture on FGM and we demand a better care for girls and women affected everywhere in Europe.

Policy Aspects

When the Change Project was drafted, few countries in Europe had National Action Plans on FGM on the way (like Finland, Austria, Greece, Ireland for example) Several other countries are about to establish coordinated and standardized procedures to protect girls and to end FGM. TERRE DES FEMMES works on the implementation of a National Action

Plan for Germany for many years now. We took a good step in this direction by the establishment of a working group which brings NGOs and state actors together. Recently the German Ministry of Family Affairs decided to conduct a nationwide study on the location and situation of potentially performing Diaspora Communities and all anti-FGM activities. We welcome this decision and demand at the same time that state government members further exchange on best practices and activities to learn from each other. Nowadays NGOs are still filling this gap and form a strong lobby on FGM related issues. Networks like EuroNet and End FGM but as well country specific working groups (in Germany the biggest is INTEGRA) and regular experts exchange creates synergy and rising awareness among politicians. Community based organisations and especially self help groups are working on the interface between the community, politics and experts groups which gives them a holistic perspective and valuable insights. Therefore these organisations should receive funding and organisational support more easily in order to proceed within these networks. TERRE DES FEMMES supported the establishment of a network of African women's organisations in Germany but the government must assume its own responsibility to encourage these minority women's groups, too.

This leads to the topic of Community Needs and Intervention Strategies:

We all know that discrimination and xenophobia is still very present in Europe and that it harms and restrains members of the diaspora communities – especially girls. Because besides the difficulties every community member faces, girls and women are discriminated twice at least: Because of their ancestry by the main society and because of their gender within the community. Within the change project we met women who can hardly read or write, who haven't left their homes without male relatives in years, who learned from a very early age that a woman's role in society can't be more diverse and ambitious than her role within the family.

To abandon Female Genital Mutilation the community members themselves must speak out for physical integrity, discuss girl's rights with parents and relatives and convince their own families, relatives and further networks.

We learned from our change agents that the level of education, the economic situation, legal state and health, low trust in state institutions and of course discrimination can hinder the abandonment of FGM massively. That's why the community's activists groups have to be involved in bigger networks and round tables, they have to be a partner and

advisor for powerful institutions. With the education received in the last one and a half years there are at least 50 new activists on FGM among the change agents whose abilities and social resources must be now used efficiently in the movement against FGM.

The dialogue within professional networks must ensure that the cultural drifts resulting from the ending of FGM are anticipated on the policy level and will be met professionally and helpfully. It sounds paradox at first but one of the biggest "community needs" to end FGM is the acknowledgement of the informed public and energetic politicians that the abandonment of this human rights violation is one of many community needs itself.

This applies for the Diaspora communities from African states as well as to many more. Some of these also suffer from FGM, which isn't acknowledged constantly yet.

Within Europe the acknowledgement of FGM as a worldwide problem will subvert the misconception that only girls of African descent can be at risk of FGM and that parents of African descent endanger their daughters more than other ethnicities. That's why TERRE DES FEMMES will include South East Asia and the Middle East much more in future activities against FGM. For example we are planning to organize an experts thinktank with activists from Indonesia, Oman and Germany.

Within the last year and besides the change project we joined several international conferences on FGM in Asian states, met activists from the Middle East and South East Asia, and collected more than 13.000 signatures within our campaign on FGM in Indonesia – the country with probably the highest amount of girls at risk worldwide! We handed a paper on this to the United Nations which later called Indonesia to better implement the Child's Rights Convention and we spoke to the Donors Working Group on the need of better evaluation of FGM in Middle East and South East Asia.

We learned a lot in this pilot project, TERRE DES FEMMES is very happy about the success of the CHANGE programme and we will continue our activities to prevent and protect girls from FGM, we will strengthen our capacities for persecution and our support services to girls at risk.

With this in mind I'm looking forward to future activities, projects and joined strategies because I'm convinced that this end of the change project is the beginning of further successful and significant protection of girls and support of women. Let's work together and reach out for a world free from the harm of Female Genital Mutilation and free from

Gender based violence!