

Graduate Women International aims to end FGM through education and community outreach

Geneva, Switzerland, 6 February 2018 – On the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Graduate Women International (GWI) engages with the international community for the total elimination of this harmful practice. As commitment to end this torturous rite of passage, GWI unanimously passed Resolution 6 at its 32nd triennial conference in 2016.

Through this resolution, GWI affirms that FGM is “an act of extreme violation of the female body. It is an expression of supreme power of man over women’s bodies”. In every society in which it is practiced, FGM reflects deeply-entrenched gender inequality and constitutes a severe barrier to girls’ and women’s education.

The World Health Organisation estimates that three million girls are at risk of FGM annually, while more than 200 million girls and women alive today have been cut in some 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia where FGM is concentrated. GWI condemns FGM as an appalling violation of the physical integrity of girls and women. This heinous practice, carried out in the name of culture, is responsible for severe and lifelong health issues, including prolonged bleeding, infection and intense physical and psychological pain denying women and girls the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and stifling their full potential as independent, worthy and proud members of society.

“FGM is not only an extreme violation of human rights, it is also an insurmountable barrier to girls’ and women’s education in many parts of the world”, says Geeta Desai, GWI President. “The positive correlation between education and overall development is well established. When girls and women are denied education the whole community suffers, not just the individual girls. FGM, as a violent rite of passage into womanhood and often prerequisite for marriage, prevents girls from fully exercising their right to education”, she adds.

FGM is most prevalent in heavily patriarchal societies, where the custodians of traditions and culture - the elders, the religious authorities and community leaders- are the main decisionmakers. Consequently, GWI calls for the total elimination of FGM through tough legislative actions and the implementation of community-led solutions where local actors and leaders are fully engaged and approached with cultural respect. Actions to end FGM must be sensitive to the community’s socio-cultural background enabling the communities to realize that it is possible to give up hurtful practices without renouncing their distinctive cultural traits.

FGM remains controversial as some cultures eliminate the practice and others steadfastly continue with cultural norms, and even transplant it into other areas. GWI’s advocacy persists towards ending FGM, noting that FGM is a violation of basic human rights and a violent act against the female body. The practice is an intolerable barrier to the advancement of the status of women and girls that cannot be tolerated any further.

Graduate Women International (GWI) is a membership-based international NGO based in Geneva, Switzerland, with presence in over 60 countries. Founded in 1919, GWI is the leading girls’ and women’s global organisation advocating for women’s rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels. GWI is in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947 and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.