



INTER-AFRICAN COMMITTEE ON TRADITIONAL PRACTICES (IAC)
Affecting the Health of Women and Children

COMITÉ INTER-AFRICAIN SUR LES PRATIQUES TRADITIONNELLES (CI-AF)

Affectant la santé des femmes et des enfants

An important victory over Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
The United Nations General Assembly adopts a resolution banning the practice

By Dr. Morissanda Kouyaté, Executive Director of the Inter-African Committee on traditional practices affecting the health of women and children (IAC)

Having registered the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of Resolution A/C.3/67/L.21/Rev.1 banning Female Genital Mutilation worldwide, the 20 December 2012 is now marked in shining letters in the history of the struggle for the elimination of this harmful and absurd traditional practice.

From scattered villages in the African forests and savannahs to the glass palace of Manhattan, the United Nations headquarters, the road has been long, sinuous and filled with social, political and economical challenges.

At the creation of the Inter-African Committee on 6 February 1984 in Dakar, Senegal, African women and men, convinced and committed and supported by partners throughout the world, had sworn to put an end to harmful traditional practices in general, and to female genital mutilation in particular. At present composed of 29 African member countries and 17 affiliated non-African countries, the IAC did not now at the time that this objective was titanic.

With the help of picture boxes, slides, videos, conferences and debates, advocacy, information and sensitization of communities, religious leaders, excisers, information and communication professionals, both traditional and modern, political leaders, legal and health professionals, teachers and educators, members of Parliament, women, men, youth, corporations, in other words all sectors of society, we have first broken the taboo surrounding this practice, before giving proof that it is one of the worst and obvious violations of the rights and physical and psychological integrity of women and girls. We have worked at four different levels: community, national, regional and international.

Regarded as impious, as missionaries in disguise sent out by “the whites”, as acculturates, as utopians, we have faced, during more than two decades, massive criticism often coming from African vindictive intellectuals. In addition, we have also faced sermons from some religious leaders who were religious in nothing but name. We never abandoned our fight or, even less, gave in to discouragement.

Thanks to a strategy focused on five axes (advocacy and sensitization, legislation, retraining of excisers, care for victims and networking), mobilizing all IAC partners, the first positive results were registered, notably the adoption of anti FGM laws in 20 African countries and in 12 non African countries; the adoption by African Heads of State of the protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, on the Rights of Women in Africa; the creation of networks of African religious leaders, of youth, of health professionals, of journalists and

traditional communicators, of parliamentarians; the adoption of the 6th February as International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM.

The most important result is the substantial decrease in the prevalence of FGM in all the countries where the practice exists.

The Inter-African Committee, convinced that FGM is a violation of the rights of women and girls, and that these rights are universal, has adopted a simple concept: universal solutions to universal problems.

Based on this observation, the IAC launched, in 2010 a draft resolution of the United Nations General Assembly banning female genital mutilation worldwide, in partnership with No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ) and La Palabre, and under the international coordination of Mrs. Chantal Compaoré, First Lady of Burkina Faso and IAC Goodwill Ambassador.

Burkina Faso and its dynamic diplomacy took the forefront to translate this IAC initiative into a political and diplomatic reality. We welcome the important role played by the Ambassadors Michel Kafando, Bruno Nongoma Zidouemba, Der Kogda and their staffs.

A significant step forward was the decision by the African Heads of State, during the summit of the African Union, held in July 2011 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, to recommend and support the resolution on FGM, to the United Nations General Assembly at its 67th session.

During our campaign, several African and international personalities were mobilized, notably Madame Djènè Condé, First Lady of the Republic of Guinée; Madame Malika Issoufou Mahamadou, First Lady of the Republic of Niger; Madame Antoinette Sassou N'Guessou, First Lady of the Republic of Congo; Madame Chantal de Souza Yayi, First Lady of Benin; Mrs. Elsie Christofias, First Lady of Cyprus; Madame Hadidja Aboubacar, First Lady of The Comoros; Mrs. Emma Bonino, Vice President of the Italian senate; Mrs. Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women; Mr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director of UNFPA; Mr. Tété Antonio, African Union Permanent Observer to the United Nations; Mr. Bertin Babadoudou, First Counsellor of the Permanent Representation of Benin to the United Nations.

Following intensive advocacy activities vis-à-vis the diplomatic representations, notably the African ambassadors' group to the UN which as a result made considerable efforts, the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly adopted, on 26 November 2012, the draft resolution "Intensifying Global Efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation".

On the 20 December 2012, in the bitter cold of New York, representing millions of women and girls, especially African, and on behalf of thousands of activists and partners and, above all, on behalf of our 29 national committees, 17 affiliates and the Goodwill Ambassador of the Inter-African Committee, we were present at the very moment when the plenary adopted the resolution: Madame Mariam Lamizana, President of IAC, Dr. Morissanda Kouyaté, Executive Director of IAC, Mr. Niccolo Figa-Talamanca, Secretary General of NPWJ, Alvilda Jablonko, Ilwad Elmi and Gianluca Eramo of NPWJ. The Chairman of the General Assembly banged the gavel indicating that by consensus, i.e. unanimously, the 193 member countries of the United Nations had adopted a historical resolution banning female genital mutilation worldwide.

This is the end of a battle that we won, but not the end of the war against female genital mutilation, which will inexorably be defeated one day. The struggle continues!