

LAUNCH OF THE AFRICA COORDINATING CENTRE FOR ABANDONMENT OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Speech read by the Principal, College of Health Sciences, Prof. Isaac O. Kibwage on behalf of the Vice Chancellor Prof. George Magoha

Thanking the various persons and organization for coming to witness this launch. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a harmful practice that violates the human rights of women and girls. It is estimated that about 140 million women worldwide have been subjected to FGM. Kenya is one of the 28 countries that practice FGM in Africa. In Africa, the FGM practicing countries form a broad band from Senegal in the west to Somalia in the east. Some communities on the Red Sea coast of Yemen are also known to practice FGM/C, and there are reports, but no clear evidence, of a limited incidence in Jordan, Oman, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Gaza) and in certain Kurdish communities in Iraq. The practice has also been reported among certain populations in India, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The most current data indicate that the prevalence of FGM/C varies significantly from one country to another – from as low as 5 per cent in Niger to as much as 99 per cent in Guinea.

The government of Kenya in 1945 during the Parliamentary enquiry on FGM stated that although the government acknowledged that FGM constituted a medical problem, it adopted a policy of slow and careful education and enlightenment to avert a revolt by “natives” guarding their tribal customs. This approach has continued until 2011 when the parliament of Kenya passed the FGM prohibition act.

The ugly side of female genital mutilation got international limelight in 1994 during the international conference on population and development (ICPD 1994), when the film of small girl being cut was shown. Since then many government and international agencies have taken up the abandonment effort.

The adoption of 2012, The United Nation general assembly (UNGA) resolution 67/146 on intensifying global efforts for the elimination of FGM, governments agreed to a ground breaking comprehensive commitment to eliminate FGM, recognizing that policies, programs and services must be part of holistic culturally sensitive approach that promotes, protects and fulfills the rights of girls and women. In 2013 preventing and responding to violence against women and girls was the focus of 57th commission on the status of women, further drawing attention to actions to end both FGM and child marriage, the harmful practices that are closely related.

The challenge of eliminating female genital mutilation remains enormous. Yet with the progress and increased commitment over the past decade, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Together we can meet the challenges. I call upon the international community to strongly support this local initiative in order to spearhead regional outcomes on the abandonment of FGM.

Kenya is recognized as a very appropriate location for a Coordinating Centre based on the displayed political will and leadership in the efforts towards FGM/C abandonment in Africa, as illustrated in the recently passed bill to Prohibit Female Genital Mutilation. Efforts towards the

abandonment of FGM/C align with Kenya's Vision 2030 to create a globally competitive and prosperous nation with a high quality of life. The vision has largely incorporated the attainment of the MDGs. FGM/C has a negative impact on the achievement of the MDGs (specifically the goals relating to improving gender equality/women's empowerment, reducing child mortality and improving maternal health) and should be addressed in conjunction with other factors that we know are counterproductive to progress.

The University of Nairobi has been identified as an institutional host for the Centre based on its demonstrated capacity for effective partnership and collaboration due to its longstanding collaboration with world health organization (WHO) and other partners. The Centre is thus crafted as a partnership between the University of Nairobi and other universities and international organizations, including the WHO/HRP. ACCAF has so far been recognized by international partners such as UNFPA, USAID, UNESCO and foreign universities such as University of Sydney, University of Washington and University of Ghent. ACCAF through its partners has been possible leader and serve as a Centre of excellence aimed at knowledge development for accelerating for elimination of FGM

Through the Africa Coordinating Centre for abandonment of Female genital mutilation/cutting (ACCAF), the University of Nairobi in partnership with other African university in FGM practicing countries would like to pursue culturally sensitive human rights based approach that promotes positive institutional and social change through a trans-disciplinary approach. Emphasizing that all regions affected by the practice of FGM will be represented at the Centre, making it a unique opportunity for dialogue, exchange of information and the best means and the most appropriate legislative instruments for the prevention and the progressive abandonment of FGM in Africa and beyond.

As the vice chancellor I pledge my full support to the activities of the Centre aimed at elimination of FGM in Africa and beyond.