

## No more FGM in the name of the UN

Benedetta Grasso (October 01, 2010)



Emma Bonino, Vice President of the Italian Senate, as well as the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Franco Frattini supported an International Campaign against FGM in New York asking for a UN Resolution that would ban this practice permanently.

In regards of gender-issues and women rights these are contradicting times: earned equal rights co-exist with hard to eradicate stereotypes, general progressive laws are entwined in hidden unspoken ones, definitions of single genders are complicated, and un-traditional behaviors are mixed with a very clear-cut depiction of men and women. Yet, there are still issues that are outrageous when it comes to women and it's not a matter of nuisances: they are simply wrong.

In Africa FGM, Female Genital Mutilation, is a barbaric practice and its roots run deep into ancient



traditions imposed by men on incredibly young girls: it's a health issue, it's a sexual violation, a psychological torture and it may lead to infections, infertility as well as decreasing female sexual pleasure. Something that comes off as a "coming of age ritual", leaves a girl scarred instead of turning her into a woman.

Italian politician [Emma Bonino](#) [2], vice President of the Italian Senate, has founded the organization [No Peace Without Justice](#) [3] that recognizes this practice as a violation of human rights and as torture. Along with [The Inter-African Committee](#) [4](IAC) and the European Network for the Prevention and Eradication of Harmful Traditional Practices, she is changing the local laws, spreading knowledge and fighting to have a Resolution, a ban of FGM, at the United Nations General Assembly.

At the Helmsley Hotel on September 23rd, 2010, during the 65th General Assembly, diplomats, members of the governments of Italy, Burkina Faso and many other countries, together with politicians, activists and members of anti-FGM organizations, attended a high-level event, discussing the steps to take in order to definitively ban FGM in the name of human dignity, solidarity and respect of women rights.

The Masters of Ceremony, Dr Morissanda Kouyatè (Director of Operations IAC-CIAF) and Dr Niccolò Figà-Talamanca emphasized that this is a historical turning point where the important thing is to make people sensitive to the issue and promote world solidarity by moving forward with this campaign.

On the campaign posters and fliers there is the picture of a young girl: the close-up of her scared, serious face. That little girl is Khady Koita, the physical proof that this is something that has to be fought. She is now a woman and wrote a book called *Mutilée* about her experience. Her goal is to increase prevention, make sure that this doesn't happen again, protect the dignity and integrity of women, and avoid the "violation of young women, of little girls that cannot speak up". "The world ban of FGM is for a better future"

Emma Bonino has dedicated her life to fight FGM and has traveled to Africa many times to speak with local governments and try to get things changed. She was pleased to see new faces in the crowd, so that the campaign can "grow in strength" and also to see some of the members of the Italian Senate and Parliament in the audience, such as Lamberto Dini - Italy's ex-Prime Minister and Foreign Minister -because "it means the institutions are listening and talking about this issue". As Bonino put it, "to ban FGM is possible, we must do it and it has to be both a bottom up and top-down approach. We need activists but also leaders".

All of the speakers agreed with her that now is the time to act and that the idea of a ban within the UN is essential.

Rachel Mayanja (Special Advisor of the UN Secretary General on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women) pointed out that the biggest challenge is not in convincing the UN but in changing the local culture, in having the people break out of the traditional mindset, of practices so deeply rooted in a culture. Shortly after Carol Bellamy (Chair of IB Board of Governors, and former Executive Director of [UNICEF](#) [5]) expressed her idea that "no matter what, violence is not culture".

Louise Arbour (President of International Crisis Group and former High Commissioner for Human Rights) declared, "This is a private thing that has now become an international issue. It has to be seen as a tradition but it is an outrage just the same. All women and men are born equal".

[Franco Frattini](#) [6], the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs said that when the matter was raised in the Italian Senate there was a strong support of the ban. "These traditions are hard to stop, but let's not wait. Let's do it now. Now is the moment. This is a civilian goal and a matter of will."

Spreading education and increasing the quality of living conditions will also help to end some of these tortures. Even today, in many societies, women have less power than men, and they often can't even make a decision on their own. It is harder than it should be to put an end to discriminations and find the best way to restore human dignity to women and girls, considering that women are the key to life, and that a healthy reproduction, personal freedom and mutual respect are



the forces that move the planet forward.

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International Campaign to Ban Female Genital Mutilation Worldwide at the 65th session of the United Nations General Assembly

Welcome by:

Mariam Lamizaba, President of Inter African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children

Alvilda Jablonk, FGM Coordinator, No Peace Without Justice

Khady Kpita, President of LA Palabre, member of EuroNet-FGM

Remarks by

Emma Bonino, Vice President of the Italian Senate, founder of No Peace Without Justice

Rachel Mayanja, Special Adviser of the UN Secretary General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women

Carol Bellamy, Chair of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Board of Governors, former Executive Director of UNICEF

Louise Arbour, President of the International Crisis Group, former High Commissioner for Human Rights

Franco Frattini, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs

Guest of Honor:

H.E. Chantal Compaorè, First Lady of Burkina Faso and Good-Will Ambassador of Inter-African Committee

Why Support a UN Ban with:

Memouna Baboni, Adviser to the President of the Republic, Benin

Natogoma Soro Coulibaly, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Cote d'Ivoire

Safia Djibril Elmi, Member of Parliament, Djibouti

Ndeye Soukeye Gueye, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Senegal

Rahim Kamara, President of Manifesto 99, Sierra Leone

Yao Kpogo, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Togo

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[1] <http://ftp.iitaly.org/files/anti-fgm1285961617jpg>

[2] <http://www.emmabonino.it/biography>

[3] <http://www.npwj.org/>

[4] <http://www.iac-ciaf.net/>

[5] <http://www.unicef.org/>

[6] <http://www.esteri.it/MAE/EN/Ministero/Ministro/>