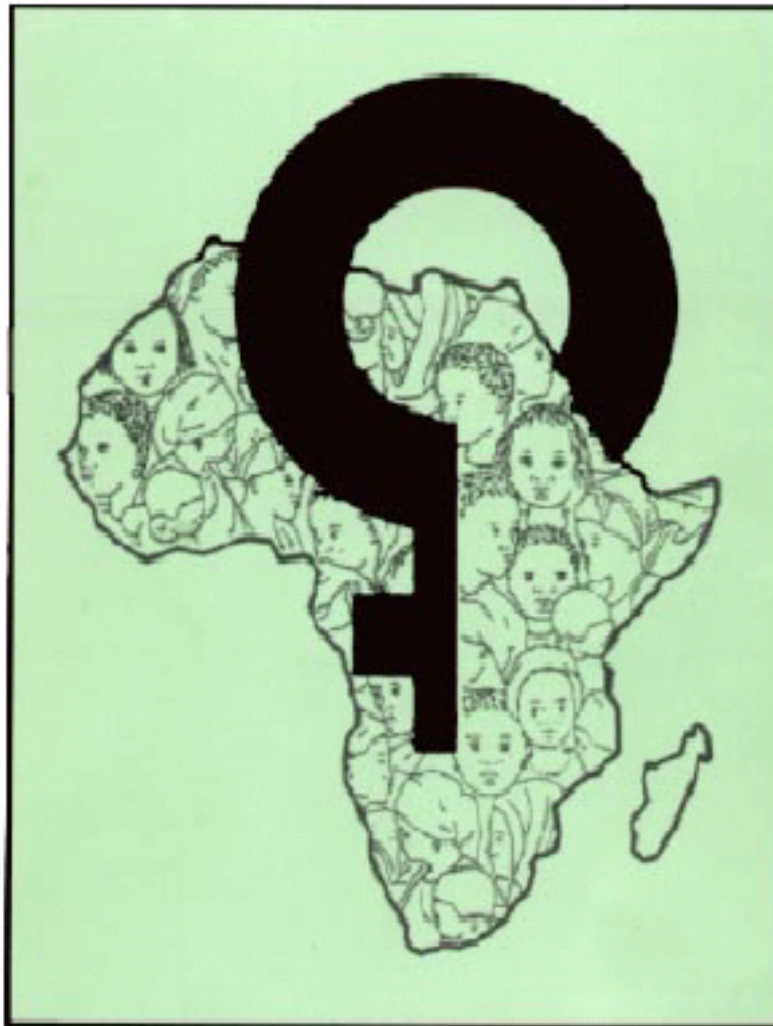


**INTER-AFRICAN COMMITTEE ON
TRADITIONAL PRACTICES AFFECTING THE HEALTH OF WOMEN AND
CHILDREN**



Newsletter N^o . 31 July 2002

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF IAC.

During the 58th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, held in Geneva from 18 March to 26 April, 2002, under Item 12 "Integration of the human rights of women and the gender perspective (a) Violence against women," I was encouraged to hear government representatives from Africa and Europe refer to FGM as a form of violence needing government attention. Representatives from Sudan and Togo mentioned the work being done in their respective countries against this practice and the name of the Sudan National Committee on Traditional Practices (SNCTP) was mentioned. To those of us working at the community, national and international levels this evolution demonstrates a visible impact of local activities on government policy orientation.

Unfortunately, however, the recent turn of events in the Sudan regarding FGM and the intent of the Ministry of Guidance and Endowments to medicalise the practice as "shitan shara'ai" has raised great international concern and mobilization.

We in the IAC would like to call on the Government of the Sudan, as a member of the UN Commission on Human Rights to discourage such contradictions that are incompatible with international standards and norms which the Republic of the Sudan is a party.

Members of IAC ought to intensify lobbying at the local level by identifying with concerned government offices that deal with health and human rights. Recognition and visibility of the work being accomplished by national committees and other NGOs in this area will certainly influence policy orientation and action. Vigilance and participation in the process when national plans are drawn for health, education and development are important to ensure integration of HTPs and gender mainstreaming.

Several international instruments, which protect women and girls from violence, exist. We need to familiarize others and ourselves with these protective measures and the monitoring bodies in order to be better prepared to present factual reports on HTPs as forms of violence. Such a move by national committees would give a balanced picture of actual situations regarding the status of women in general and HTPs in particular. For example, the Committee on the Rights of the Child meets three times a year to examine reports from countries on compliance regarding the Convention of the Rights of the Child. The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women also holds its meetings for monitoring as does the Committee on Social and Economic Rights. We should use these systems to send our own reports as NGOs, at the right time.

EDITORIAL

THE ROLE OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST FGM/HTPs

In keeping with the recommendation of the 5th Regional Conference/General Assembly of IAC, a scientific committee was set up with the mandate to strengthen the operational capacity of IAC in the area of research, training, planning and implementation, supervision and evaluation and publication and communication. The scientific committee is made up of members of IAC drawn from multidisciplinary backgrounds with wealth of knowledge in research. The role of the scientific committee of IAC as the vanguard in our present fight to eradicate FGM/HTPs cannot be over-emphasized or ignored.

By setting up the scientific committee, IAC believes that it would conduct cutting edge scientific research and publish findings that would offer sufficient publicity on the work of IAC necessary for propagating the fight against FGM/HTPs. It would help create and enhance a workable policy approach in the fight to eradicate FGM/HTPs. The facts and figures of research reports would be shared among countries to provide the fundamental premise needed for restoring hope and human dignity to women and girls affected by FGM/HTPs. It would practically go a long way to unmask "faceless" traditional practices considered violent to women and girls handed down to keep society perpetually tied to the apron strings of tradition. It is on this note that deeply rooted behaviour and attitude could be challenged to earn the expected positive change, which would invariably change the nature of the practice and ultimately, the struggle.

The 1st scientific committee meeting held on January 31- February 1 2002 had in keeping with its mandate, defined the structure, framework for action, priority activities and its mode of operation. It specified operational research as its priority area with focus on participatory learning approach of action research - an approach considered sound for community participation in identifying and tackling its problems. Its 2nd meeting of July 2-5, 2002 in Addis Ababa was to fashion out tools in operational research for measuring impact based on the experiences garnered by IAC in the field. The tools developed were to meet national, regional and international standards. Using the human, material and financial resources at its disposal, the brainstorming sessions culminated in the sharing of ideas that led to the preparation of the final document on tools for measuring impact.

This landmark achievement by the scientific committee lays the foundation for action oriented researches being carried out at the national committee level that would meet growing global challenges at the regional and international levels. It is a step towards conducting researches, reproducing, publishing and disseminating the findings. It is only when all these have been achieved that we can clearly see the triumph of statistical facts and figures over guesswork and coarse estimates. We would have provided an avenue for taking away blunt facts by offering objective, valid and reliable data to sharpen key approaches in the fight to eradicate FGM/HTPs and contribute creditably to the body of knowledge.

NEWS IN BRIEF

BENIN: NEW LEGISLATION

The National Assembly of Benin has adopted the proclamation on the "*Code of Persons and the Family*" which offers numerous provisions for the right of women, relating particularly to the prevention of forced marriages and the "levirat", two traditional practices that have been harmful to women. The Code also provides women the right to maintain their name in all official documents, together with their marital name.

After the adoption of the family code, numerous delegates expressed keen interest in translating the voluminous document of 1,033 articles into the principal languages of the nation to make it understandable to the people and popularising it.

The adoption of this legislation finally fills the legal void created in the customary law of 1931 which was rendered obsolete when Benin gained independence in 1960.■

BURKINA FASO: MARIAM LAMIZANA MADE MINISTER

It is with great pleasure and immense satisfaction that we would like to inform the IAC family of the appointment of Mme Mariam Lamizana as Minister of Social Work/Action. Mariam is a pioneer in the fight against FGM and other HTPs. Her devotion, dynamism and vision have won her great recognition and appreciation.

Until her appointment, Mariam was on the Executive Board of IAC. She also served on several occasions as Special Envoy to many countries for monitoring FGM/HTPs. She was equally the President of *Comité National de Lutte contre la Pratique de l'Excision* (CNLPE), Burkina Faso and as well as President of *Voix de Femmes*.

We are certain that Mariam will continue to promote the objectives of IAC in her higher position as Minister.

Congratulations, Mariam. We wish you success in your new position.■

CHAD: EVALUATION MISSION REPORT

Mme Diariatou Kourouma, IAC's French Programme Officer, undertook a mission to Chad from 19 - 27 March 2002, with the main aim of carrying out evaluation and monitoring of the overall programmes of *Comité National du CI-AF* (CONA-CIAF). Excision is practiced in 10 provinces: Batha, Biltine, Chari, Baquirmi, Guera, Logone Oriental, Moyens Chari, Quaddai, Salmat and Tandjile. To combat the practise, she recommended the setting up of Alternative Employment Opportunities (AEO) projects for ex-excisers.

The report also pointed out that during the past two years, the Committee has essentially concentrated its efforts on lobbying government institutions and the National Assembly. The office of National Health and that of Reproductive Health are executing programmes, supported by UNFPA, to take care of victims of harmful traditional practices. The project team collaborates with the Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa and ten women with fistula have already received treatment.

Youth Programme

The Youth programme, which involves information, education and communication, the report noted, was receiving considerable attention. A survey conducted by the National Committee in three provinces where at least 1461 adolescents were adequately informed showed that majority of youths reject FGM and expressed strong opposition to the practice.

Perspective:

More surveys are envisaged to be undertaken in collaboration with WHO/AFRO in order to develop a more comprehensive strategy for the elimination of FGM in Burkina

Faso, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, DR Congo and Mali■

ETHIOPIA: 2ND SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 2 - 5 JULY 2002 HELD IN ADDIS ABABA

IAC has been employing various strategies to stop FGM. As a part of its evolutionary process, it was decided at the 5th General Assembly that a scientific committee composed of researchers, sociologists, doctors and activists be set up. The meeting of the committee was to (a) develop viable indicators for determining impact, tools and manuals for operational research and training. (b) Review existing materials to prepare an annotated bibliography.

The 2nd Scientific Committee meeting took place on 2 - 5 July 2002. After presentations, analysis and discussions, the Scientific produced an invaluable document containing impact indicators based on experience gained from field operations. This document is available for IAC members and partners■

KENYA: VACATION WITHOUT FGM

Lillian J.C. Plapan reported that on the 28th June 2002, the KENCTRAP negotiated for a "Vacation without FGM" in Parura, West Pokot where FGM is quite prevalent. In collaboration with Sentinelles, KENCTRAP VAMS negotiated with youths, elders TBAs and excisers for one week on the need to ensure a vacation free FGM. Sensitisation laid the foundation for the participants denouncing the practice of FGM. Alternative Rite of passage was discussed and questions were raised and floodgates of remarkable answers were offered.

The issue of girls being fully matured before being given out for marriage was hammered on. The need to allow girls to go to school to acquire the necessary skills for development was raised and it caught the interest of the people. However, girls who could not go to school were to be given proper guidance on marriage and allowed to accept a suitor if she

was matured. Setat/KENCTRAP VAMS and members of the girl's family would carry out the preparation either at one home or in school for marriage.

On changing this age long culture, they suggested that the team should approach other members of the community.

In Konyau, West Pokot, similar negotiation took place. A discussion with the men showed that they preferred mutilated women. The women said they had changed. The men admitted quite frankly that they were not aware of the ordeal women go through during FGM and the effects thereafter. A one-week seminar at village level was held in Chepnyal.

In each of the places where the negotiation was carried out, one woman was chosen by the people as a go-between in order to meet the chiefs to fashion out laws against FGM. Mrs. Mitei was to co-ordinate a seminar for one week for the identified elders to map out alternative rite of passage and when it could be held. Posters produced by the youths were to be printed.

AEO projects showed considerable progress with ex-excisors promising to abandon the practice totally having been involved in income generating activities.

Impact

Plapan noted that people were becoming more aware and were changing their attitude towards excising their daughters based on the harmful effects of the practice. One hundred and six girls saved from mutilation and early marriages have been offered educational opportunities in various schools within and outside the district.

The treatment of VVF recorded 65 women undergoing successful repairs. A rehabilitated victim served as resource person during the negotiation for vacation free FGM in Konyau. Twenty more women have been pencilled for repairs in October 2002■

MALI: AMSOPT AND APDF MAKE IMPACT ON THE ERADICATION OF FGM

Two dynamic national committees: *l'Association Malienne pour le Suivi et l'Orientation des Pratiques Traditionnelles* (AMSOPT) and *l'Association pour le Progrès et la Défense des Droits des Femmes Maliennes* (APDF) have effectively made appreciable impact on the eradication of FGM.

AMSOPT focuses on public and community mobilisation by targeting different groups. The training programme for youth has reached a large number of potential leaders through peer educators. In March 2001, a hundred youths participated in a training workshop and 24 youth leaders were selected and trained as peer educators. The programme for the reconversion of excisers has witnessed considerable progress. After intensive sensitization, AMSOPT reports that religious leaders have joined the campaign to eradicate FGM.

APDF, on the other hand has adopted the human rights based approach in its fight against FGM. It works with the Association of Women Lawyers focusing on the human rights implications of harmful traditional practices. It collaborates with judges and other relevant government officers. APDF considers youth as viable partners in the anti-FGM campaign and as such places emphasis on youth mobilisation and training. A film has been produced on youth involvement in the eradication of FGM.

These two organisations serve as the national co-ordinating body with the government on issues of FGM. One very important outcome of its work on lobbying and advocacy as well as mobilization effort was the open declaration made by His Excellency, President Alpha Oumar Konare on 8 June 2001 condemning FGM.■

MALI: NEW LEGISLATION PROCLAIMED

On 29 May 2002, the Council of Ministers of Mali passed a new legislation on "*The Promotion of Women, The Child and The Family*" which provides for the elimination of the practice of excision. The Proclamation, which appeared on *l'Essor* of 30 Mai 2002, foresees the elimination of excision in Mali through:

- Legal provision relative to the prevention and eventual elimination of the practice of excision by educating the parents, the family and the society;
- Instituting a national programme to combat the practice in a co-ordinated manner with mechanisms for evaluation.

IAC welcomes and appreciates this government action.■

SOMALIA: SAVE SOMALI WOMEN AND CHILDREN (SSWC) OUT TO SAVE AND SERVE.

SSWC, a non-governmental humanitarian organization founded in 1992 by a group of Somali women intellectuals, from a cross-section of the community considers it a moral obligation to save and serve women and girls by promoting the human rights of women. Its office is in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia.

Somalia is a sunni-muslim country. In 1988 the country was torn apart by civil war. However, Somali women have struggled to form different self-help organizations to cope with the difficult period the country is passing through.

FGM is widely practised in all Somali communities with girls undergoing genital mutilation between the age of 7 - 9 years. SSWC's strategies to eliminate FGM are

- Capacity building through workshops and debates
- Advocacy and lobbying measures

- Offering strategic assistance to facilitate flow of information
- Co-ordination and co-operation among the concerned parties involved
- Evaluation and monitoring

A project tagged "Campaign against FGM in Somalia" was carried out in December 2001. The programme covered Mogadishu, Adado and other populous cities in Somalia. We are encouraged by the work of SSWC and wish the members success■



PHOTO:
GROUP OF SOMALI WOMEN IN TRAINING

SPAIN: EQUIS-MCF COMES ON BOARD

A new Group, EQUIS-MCF in Barcelona, Spain has joined the IAC family. Between 2000 and 2002, EQUIS-MCF has been active among the immigrant population working with and training midwives, nurses, health professional, immigration officials, students, Red Cross Volunteers, etc.

The President of EQUIS-MGF is Isabel Riesa Chobeche. IAC is pleased to welcome the organisation on board■

SUDAN: SNCTP ON THE WEB

The Sudan National Committee on Traditional Practices (SNCTP) has taken a giant step towards closing the information gap by announcing a website:www.snctp.org

SUDAN: EVALUATION MISSION SHOWS PROOF

Mrs. Almaz Haile Selassie, IAC English Programme Officer between 3 - 5 January 2002, undertook an evaluation Mission to Sudan. She evaluated the Alternative Employment Opportunity (AEO) project in the Wad-Elo-Bashir region for 10 TBAs, mostly illiterates.

The initial AEO project was for the production of charcoal and dry fish. This project failed due to lack of raw materials and has now been replaced by a Co-operative shop, which appears to be more profitable. Most of the TBAs are not directly involved in the activities of the work but simply get an income from the profit. During the discussions, a better idea was proposed for the creation of an additional AEO project - a tea canteen in a well-located area to attract more patronage. The canteen would have a recreation centre for many displaced people, and would provide an ideal spot for campaigning against FGM.



PHOTO:
ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT SHOP - SUDAN 2002

Through the efforts of the Sudanese National Committee on Traditional Practices extensive programme, Mrs. Haile Selassie reported that there were encouraging trends in attitudinal and behavioural change. For instance, in University of Badri, professors and administrators stressed that they had observed a positive change of attitude amongst their students. Equally, discussions with chiefs and elders in the displaced area of

Wad-el-Bashir with a population of about 40,000 revealed a steady decline in FGM practice.

Campaigns organised by youths in Sudan, are practically orientated to using their vacations to sensitise the communities.

The Government gives due recognition of the work of SNCTP and other NGOs. The Executive Director of SNCTP, Amna Hassan is also the Vice-President of the National AIDS Control as well as being the Vice-President of Sudanese Council of Voluntary Agencies (SCOVA)■

SWITZERLAND: IAC BIDS FAREWELL TO INES

After 8 years of enthusiastic and dedicated work to IAC at its Liaison Office, Geneva, Switzerland, Ms Ines Ayala, IAC Programme Specialist, left at the end of August 2000 back home to Chile with her family. IAC thanks Ines for her dedication, hard work and excellent results. We wish her and the family a happy and prosperous life in Chile■

ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL – IAC CREATES SENSATION!

IAC made its presence felt at the 58th Commission on Human Rights held in March-April 2002. With budget cut restricting the proceedings, time allotted for speakers was drastically reduced. However, IAC was able to make a statement. The President of IAC, Mrs. Berhane Ras-Work requested permission from the chairman to allow her call the attention of the plenary participants to the plight of women. When the request was granted, she requested that in view of the shortened time for NGOs, to make their presentation, she would like the Chairperson to call for a minute silence to remember all the Women who have been victims of violence especially FGM. To everyone's surprise, the request was granted and a round of applause and laughter broke out at the end of the one-minute silence.

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF IAC, MRS. BERHANE RAS-WORK TO THE 58TH COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, MARCH-APRIL 2002.

Violence against women is universal, pervasive, and its manifestations vary from bride burning, female infanticide, rape, battering to female genital mutilation.

When the violator is a husband, a friend or an enemy, it is easier to identify, condemn and take action. Progress has been made to redress these forms of violence in terms of legislation, counselling and awareness raising on the part of women and the public at large.

The issue becomes challenging when the violator involves a whole society sometimes a nation, with upheld traditional values and practices. Female Genital Mutilation continues to exist causing much suffering, pain and sometimes even death, because it is condoned by society as a positive value.

Mr. Chairman, it needed courage, perseverance and strategies on the part of some NGOs to raise this issue for discussions and decisions at the level of the Sub-Commission and the Commission.

The Inter-African Committee, and members of the NGO working on Traditional Practices welcomed with great satisfaction the appointment of Mrs. Halima Embarek Warzazi as a Special Rapporteur on the issue of Harmful Traditional Practices, following a resolution of this August Commission.

Concerned NGOs mobilized their efforts to facilitate the work of Mrs. Warzazi by providing her information and contacts to help in the compilation of her report. The Special Rapporteur submission shows that harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation continue to exist despite efforts by specialised agencies, but more particularly by NGOs.

The report called for more commitment and involvement of governments. Among the concrete proposals contained, the organization of three seminars on this question, in Africa, Europe and Asia, was underlined. The Commission adopted this proposal at its 56th session and upheld it at its 57th session.

Unfortunately, however, the proposal has not been implemented to date. The Special Rapporteur faces shortage of facilities to accomplish her mandate appropriately.

My organization, while welcoming the adoption of the resolution by the Commission pertaining to traditional practices and the appointment of a Special Rapporteur (E/CN.4/1988/57), would like to urge and call for monitoring to ensure the implementation of decisions made. We appreciate highly the dedication and work of the Special Rapporteur on traditional practices, but we also are concerned about the difficulties she faces due to shortage of funds and facilities and facilities to enable her to carry out her task fully.

The Inter-African Committee, is disposed to assist in any way possible the office of the High Commissioner in the organization of the proposed seminars, considering this measure as an important strategy in terms of engaging governments more in the fight against harmful traditional practices.

We are looking up to this Commission with great hope, like the millions of victims of female genital mutilation and other forms of harmful traditional practices for concrete actions leading towards the alleviation of long standing human suffering which menaces the well-being and lives of women and girl children. ■

RADHIKA COOMARASWAMY REPORTS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women presented an extremely interesting report

(E/CN.4/2002/83) entitled "Cultural Practices in the Family that are Violent Towards Women". In her report, Ms. Coomaraswamy gave in-depth information on cultural practices in the family that violates women's rights around the world:

- FGM
- Marriage
- Practices that violate women's reproductive rights
- Honour Killings
- The pledging of girls for economic and cultural appeasement
- Witch hunting
- Caste
- Discriminatory laws
- Son preference
- Restrictive practices
- Practices that violate women's reproductive rights
- Incest.

Mme Coomaraswamy also reported on ideologies that perpetuate cultural practices considered violent towards women:

- The Regulation of female sexuality
- Masculinity and violence

The Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women will present her last report to the 59th Commission on Human Rights in March 2003 which will give an overview of her work during the past 10 years. In this regard all NGOs were mandated to submit relevant information to her office before the end of this year. ■

COMMISSION ON STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW) ADVOCATES GENDER EQUALITY

The President of IAC attended the 46th session of the CSW. The session was held on 4 - 15 March 2002 and focused on "Gender and Poverty Eradication." On this theme, panel discussions, debates and formal and informal meetings were held.

It was reaffirmed that women constitute the world's poorest sector of the population

although their contribution economically and socially is considered indispensable. Women are not involved in decision-making on economic policies and their needs are never given sufficient attention.

Gender equality as a guiding principle in any national or international plan and strategy was recognized as vital for sustainable development and peace.■

WHO ASSEMBLY BRAINSTORMS ON COLLABORATIVE WORK WITH NGOS

IAC has been a member of an Ad Hoc Health Group of the WHO Assembly that is focused on Health Promotion since the Djakarta Conference on Health Promotion held in 1997. For the past five years, the group has organised round table discussions with government delegations, WHO staff and NGOs to forge collaborative work. The recent meeting of the group took place on 13-18th May 2002.

This year, the Group invited Dr. Samba, WHO's Regional Director for Africa to present a paper on *"NGOs and Health Promotion in Africa: Making the Difference"*. Mrs. Berhane Ras-Work also made a presentation entitled *"This is how we work in Africa"* in which she highlighted the activities of the nine members of the Ad Hoc Health Group in Africa.■

JOINT CONSULTATION BETWEEN THE OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND IAC RAISES HOPE.

A Joint-Consultation between the IAC and the Special Rapporteur on Harmful Traditional Practices, Mrs. Halima Embarek Warzazi was held on 24 May 2002 in the Palais des Nations. This consultation was intended to present the unfolding problem of harmful traditional practices among immigrant communities in Europe.

Mag. Barbara Prammer, Member of Parliament of Austria and spokesperson for the IAC in Europe was invited to participate in the consultation. Dr. Marie-Hélène Franjou,

President of GAMS France and Coumba Touré were also invited to present their work on specifically, early marriage. Ms. Carin Benninger-Budel, of the World Organization against Torture spoke about honour crimes.

Discussion focused on FGM in Europe. Some of the recommendations made at the end of the consultation focussed on:

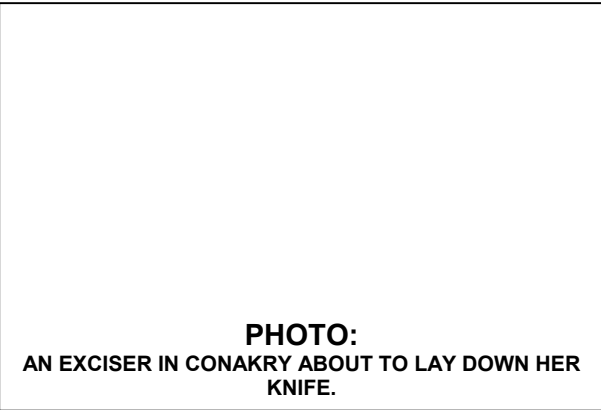
1. Respect for basic human rights and dignity of the individual.
2. A sensitive and humanitarian approach in dealing with traditional practices.
3. Information to immigrants on existing legislation, which prohibit HTPs.
4. Preparing easily understandable and simple information materials for immigrants regarding legislation, health, risk of HTPs, counselling services etc.
5. Empowering the affected communities in order for them to make informed decisions to stop practices such as early marriage and FGM.
6. Encouraging the adoption of policy on the elimination of violence against women.
7. Developing a special convention on the elimination of violence against women, similar to the European declaration on trafficking of women.
8. The term "female mutilation" should continue to be used because it has since 1990 been the accepted term and has been used by the UN and its specialized agencies.■

"THE LIGHT OF THE RISING STARS" ("LA LUMIÈRE DE ÉTOILES À NAITRES"): AN IAC DOCUMENTARY FILM BY CLAUDE JOURDE MAKES ITS DEBUT.

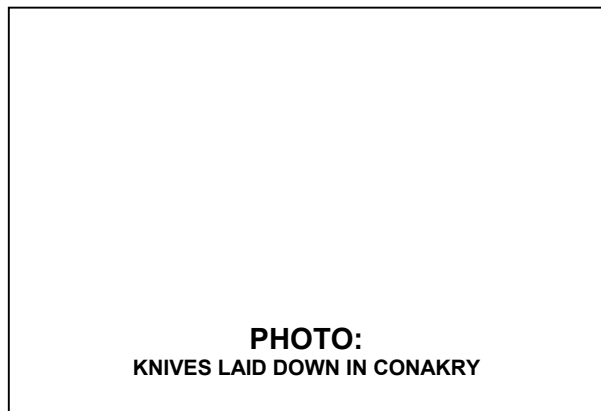
Claude Jourde, a French producer undertook the production of a film to illustrate the work of the Inter-African Committee in Guinea and Ethiopia. The film demonstrates the progress achieved in the fight against FGM and other harmful practices.

Production started in Guinea in May 2001 with assistance of the National Committee.

Quite fortunately, an important ceremony that took place in Conakry on the 10th May when excisers formally deposed of their knives in the presence of government officials, religious leaders, and medical corps was recorded.



Local television and radios relayed the event and the song "L'excision, plus jamais ça" by the well-known international singer Oumou Dioubate was aired to emphasize and reinforce the struggle.



During the celebration, women and men in a small village called Kinierowher were interviewed. A harrowing incident was filmed when Awa mourning the death of her child following an excision, promised to join the movement against FGM.

Several key figures, like Oudy Oury Barry, a senior midwife, activists Jeanne Manguet and Batura Camara were filmed speaking about three generations of drama and suffering following excisions.

The production team arrived Ethiopia in April 2002, and working with the National Committee on Traditional Practices of Ethiopia (NCTPE), visited many places in the country to film the struggle against several harmful practices.

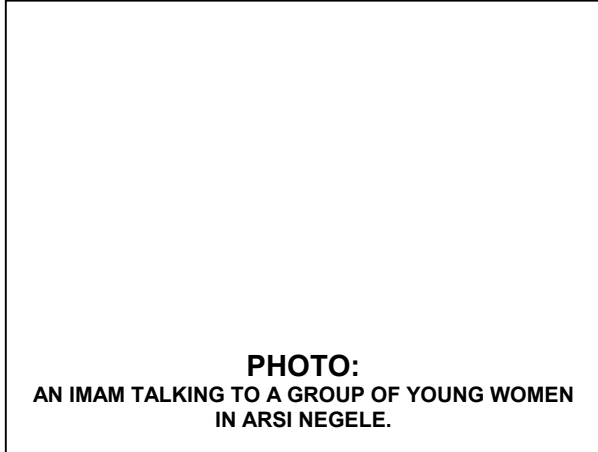
In Bahir Dar, where early marriage is still being practised, two young girls married at the age of 9 and 10 years respectively were filmed. The first girl now 25 years old gave birth at the age of 11 and was paralysed on her left arm and leg 14 years ago as a result of early childbirth. She lives with her small daughter having been abandoned by her husband. The second girl had a stillbirth at the age of 13 and her husband too abandoned her.

At Meshenti, a village near Bahar Dar, a third young girl explained how she was abandoned by the society following a forced early marriage, which led to her becoming incontinent. As a result of her pitiable condition, she has equally been abandoned by members of her family and now lives in isolation. A generous person arranged for her to be treated in the famous Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa. Despite this success, the young girl still remains ostracised.

A director of a primary school explained on camera how he tried to convince the parents not to allow young girls to be married off early. In view of the extent of this problem, the Ethiopian Government has just re-enacted legislation prohibiting marriage before the age of 18. However, no action has been taken against the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which continues to allow such marriages.

Abduction, another harmful practice was filmed in Arsi Negele, some kilometres away from Addis Ababa. Young girls and boys, encouraged by social workers acted in a play called "The Light of the Rising Stars. The play tells how a girl was abducted on the street while going to school by a man assisted by three male collaborators. The Imam of the village, women associations, and the IAC NC

denounced the practice of abduction called for government intervention. In the play, all ended well but in reality, girls that are abducted and raped usually have parents accepting the abductors as sons-in-law.



The shooting of the film continued in Harar close to the border with Somalia where NCTPE combats female genital mutilation. There the women came on camera about the repeated sufferings inflicted on them by their husbands. The women narrated the ordeal of re-infibulation after each birth or on the demand of the husband before he embarks on a journey.

The filming ended at the Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa where Dr. Hamlin, an Australian by origin, recounted how she and her husband founded the hospital 40 years ago. She pointed out that over 300 operations are performed in the hospital every year with about 10% failure rate. Despite this shortcoming, Dr. Hamlin explained that the hospital gains satisfaction from the successful cases.

Through these testimonies the film shows the strong determination of women and men from all faith and walks of life to end the practice of FGM and early marriage so that women will at last be fully respected and their health accorded the value it deserves.

"The Light of the Rising Stars" illustrates in sum the solidarity, co-operation and co-ordination existing among countries in the fight to eradicate FGM/HTPs and displays the familial role played by IAC to ensure the support of governments in providing hope and life to women and girls. ■

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The significant support offered by our partners has made it possible for IAC to carry out its lofty programmes aimed at eradicating FGM and other harmful traditional practices and promoting the beneficial ones. We are grateful to the following for their invaluable contribution:

AusAID (Australian Agency for International Development)
DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency)
FINNIDA (Finnish International Development Agency)
Ministère de la Coopération française et CECI
The Government of the Netherlands
NORAD (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation)
SDC (Swiss Development Cooperation)
DFID (Department for International Development) United Kingdom
USAID (United States Agency for International Development)

OAU (Organization of African Unity)/ AU (African Union)
ECA (Economic Commission for Africa)
UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund)
UNICEF (United Nations Children Fund)
UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)
WHO (World Health Organization)
The World Bank

Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie, France
AIDoS (The Italian Association for Women in Development)
Association Supporting IAC, Japan
Bread for the World, Germany
Catholic Relief Services
Church of Sweden Aid
Danish Medical Women's Association
The Ford Foundation, USA
IWDA (International Women's Development Agency), Australia
Kvinnefronten, Norway
Mama Cash
Match International Center, Canada
Misereor, Germany
Global Ministries of the Uniting Churches in the Netherlands
The Norwegian Red Cross
Rädda Barnen, Sweden
Tokyo Women's Club, Japan
Women's Action Against FGM, Japan
Private persons

**The Inter-African Committee
on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children
is a network of affiliates in 28 African Countries with 7 European Group Sections, Japan and New Zealand:**

1. Angola : Comité Angolais sur les Pratiques Traditionnelles (CAPT-CA-AF)
2. Benin: CI-AF Bénin
3. Burkina Faso: Comité National de Lutte contre la Pratique de l'Excision (CNLPE), Burkina Faso : Voix de Femmes
4. Cameroon: CI-AF Cameroon
5. Congo: Comité National des Droits des Femmes
6. Côte d'Ivoire: CI-AF Côte d'Ivoire
7. Djibouti: Comité national de lutte contre les pratiques traditionnelles (CNLCPT)
8. Egypt: Egyptian Society for the Prevention of Harmful Traditional Practices (ENC)
9. Ethiopia: National Committee on Traditional Practices of Ethiopia (NCTPE)
10. Gambia: Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP)
11. Ghana: Ghanaian Association for Women's Welfare (GAWW)
12. Guinea: Cellule de coordination sur les Pratiques Traditionnelles Affectant la santé des Femmes et des Enfants (CPTAFE)
13. Guinea-Bissau: Comité national de lutte contre les pratiques néfastes
14. Kenya: Kenya National Council on Traditional Practices (KNCTP)
15. Liberia: National Association on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (NATPAH)
16. Mali: Association Malienne pour le Suivi et l'Orientation des Pratiques Traditionnelles (AMSOPT)
17. Mali: Association pour le Progrès et la Défense des Droits des Femmes Maliennes (APDF)
18. Mauritania: Association Mauritanienne sur les Pratiques Traditionnelles affectant la Santé des Femmes et des Enfants (AMPTSFE)
19. Niger: Comité Nigérien sur les Pratiques Traditionnelles (CONIPRAT)
20. Nigeria: Nigeria National IAC Committee
21. Senegal: Comité Sénégalais sur les Pratiques Traditionnelles (COSEPRAT)
22. Sierra Leone: Sierra Leone Association on Women's Welfare (SLAWW)
23. Somalia: committee to be reorganized
24. Sudan: Sudan National Committee on Traditional Practices (SNCTP)
25. Tanzania: National Committee on Traditional Practices
26. Tchad: Comité National du CI-AF (CONA-CIAF)
27. Togo: Comité National du Togo (CI-AF Togo)
28. Uganda: National Committee on Traditional Practices (NCTPU)

IAC Groups/Sections:

1. Austria: African Women's Organization in Vienna
2. Belgium: Groupe femmes pour l'Abolition des Mutilations Sexuelles (GAMS Belgique)
3. France: Groupe femmes pour l'Abolition des Mutilations Sexuelles (GAMS)
4. Netherlands: a) Federation of Somalian Associations in the Netherlands (FSAN)
b) Pharos Foundation
5. New Zealand: FGM Network in New Zealand
6. Spain: Women's Association Against Mutilations (AMAM)
7. Spain: EQUIS-MGF
8. Sweden: a) National Council of Immigrant Women's Associations (RIFFI)
b) National Association for Ending FGM (RISK)
9. United Kingdom: London Black Women's Health Action Project (LBWHAP)

In addition, the IAC represents hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteers, from high African government officials to traditional leaders and young women in rural villages of Africa, sometimes illiterate but always strongly determined to ensure the health and well being of women and children.