

Human Rights Council - 26th session

(10th June – 27th June 2014)

High Level Panel discussion on Female Genital Mutilation

Statement by Ireland

16 June 2014

Ireland aligns itself with the statement delivered by Greece on behalf of the European Union and joins others in welcoming this important discussion.

The practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is a clear violation of the human rights of women and girls, infringes on children's rights to special protection, and represents one of the most pervasive forms of gender based violence. For the majority of girls, the experience of FGM is one of excruciating pain followed by trauma and lifelong health complications.

We acknowledge that FGM is a challenging issue to address. However, although reasons for practicing FGM vary across culture and countries, there is a common joint underlying factor: FGM is an expression of gender inequalities and power imbalances between men and women.

Ireland addresses FGM in its overseas aid programme through broader work on gender equality, women's empowerment, and gender-based violence. In particular, Ireland has adopted a twin track approach to combat FGM working with grassroots organisations while also supporting the development of legislation on gender based-violence in its key partner countries.

There is no doubt that over the past ten years, significant progress has been achieved. However the reduction in prevalence has not been as substantial as hoped for.

In order for change to come about, there has to be a critical mass of support for its abandonment. A woman's decision to refuse FGM needs to be accompanied by family, social and political support for her decision. In order to do that, we need to strengthen the legislative and policy framework to protect girls at risk of FGM with corresponding increases in legal actions against perpetrators. We also need to develop stronger partnerships with civil society organisations, the media and religious leaders working towards the elimination of FGM. At community level, we need to take actions, sensitive to local cultural and religious concerns, that promote positive social change among a significant number of families to enable them to make a collective, coordinated choice to abandon the practice so that no single girl or family is disadvantaged by the decision.

We would like to ask the distinguished panel how can we intensify the work against female genital mutilation to ensure that positive change happens at community level?