



PRESS RELEASE

Determination to end FGM in Middle East

The Hague / Suleymaniah June 11, 2012 The silence on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the Middle East needs to be broken. To end this brutal violation of human rights that is systematically applied in the region, NGOs Wadi and Hivos are expanding their pioneering work in Iraq to eleven countries.

FGM was regarded for decades solely as an “African problem”. But it is not just that; several indications and first pilot surveys now shed light on a topic that was never spoken about: FGM is present everywhere in the Middle East.

After a first key conference in Beirut in January with FGM-activists from several Middle Eastern countries, Hivos and Wadi decided to jointly engage in a programme to combat FGM in the region. The first phase of the programme is to raise awareness about the problem of FGM in the Middle East and initialize a public discourse about it. An important aspect is also to strengthen and enlarge the regional network in combating the practice.

In a second phase, selected national partner organisations will boost a concerted effort, adapted to the special conditions for their countries. One of the aims will be the implementation of laws and policies prohibiting FGM.

The campaign Stop FGM Middle East is already under way. First public starting points will be the official presentation of a survey by Wadi about the rates of FGM in the Kirkuk-Governorate on June 13, a public event in the Dutch Parliament addressing FGM on June 19 and a celebration in Suleymaniah on June 20 of the adoption of the domestic violence law in Iraqi Kurdistan one year ago, the first law in the region that bans FGM.

Background

Women’s rights in the Middle East are violated structurally and on a large scale. Domestic violence, FGM, child and forced marriage and honor killings are the gravest forms of gender based violence. Among these violations, FGM is most widespread.

The practice is culturally deeply rooted. It is seen as a religious obligation and as a means to suppress the sexuality of women. On the other hand it is also believed that circumcision forms a prerequisite for successful marriage. Fact of the matter is that millions of girls who are mutilated suffer from the negative physical and psychological consequences of the mutilation.

Wadi in Iraq

German/ Iraqi organization Wadi has been working tirelessly to fight FGM in Iraq, mostly in the Kurdish region and more recently in Kirkuk, with the support of Hivos. It was found that more than 50% of the women and girls in Iraqi Kurdistan were mutilated. In Kirkuk, where the ethnic composition of the population is representative for the whole of Iraq, 40% of the women had undergone FGM. Several efforts – field work, campaigning and public pressure – have raised awareness amongst the population and politicians about the negative consequences of FGM. This eventually led to the Kurdish parliament passing an anti FGM law.

WHO definition

FGM is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It is often carried out on minors and is a violation of the rights of children. The practice also

violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity, the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to life when the procedure results in death. FGM comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons and is mostly carried out by traditional circumcisers.

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