



**JOINING FORCES**

*For All Children*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 29 April 2024**

## **Joining Forces Coalition calls for the immediate halt to plan repeal of anti-FGM/C law in The Gambia**

On March 18, 2024, the Gambian parliament initiated a bill to repeal The Gambia's anti- female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) law which protects and criminalizes the practice of female genital mutilation in the country. In an initial vote, most of the deputies, i.e. forty-two of those present voted to repeal the 2015 law banning FGM/C. The Joining Forces West and Central African condemns in the strongest terms harmful practices such as excision which is also internationally recognized as gender specific child abuse and constitutes a major infringement to the bodily autonomy of women and girls.

We, as the West and Central Africa Joining Forces coalition strongly believe that The Gambia must respect its international obligations, particularly the African Union's [Maputo Protocol](#) on Women's Rights, which the country ratified in 2005. According to UNICEF, 76% of Gambian women aged 15 to 49 and 75% of Gambian women aged 15 to 19<sup>1</sup> have undergone genital mutilation. The repeal of the law banning these harmful practices could lead to an increased number of victims.

FGM/C is a brutal violation of human rights and of the physical and moral integrity of girls and women, bringing no health benefits for girls and women, only danger and long-term consequences on their lives. This potential decision to reverse the ban will have very serious consequences for girls. Condemned by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which the Gambia ratified in 1993, the practice can cause hemorrhaging and serious life-threatening infections of the reproductive tract and has tragically claimed countless lives. The mortality rate of newborn babies increases considerably when their mothers have undergone severe forms of female genital mutilation, which constitutes a multi-generational tragedy. Psychologically, little girls can suffer psychological stress, depression, and anxiety, leading to behavioral problems linked to a loss of confidence in those around them.

The members of the West and Central Africa Joining Forces Coalition are deeply concerned by the action of the Gambian Parliaments to repeal the law which, if allowed to happen, will constitute a serious step backwards, and a grave violation of the rights of girls and women, not only in the Gambia but also in the sub-region. This repeal not only threatens the well-being and rights of Gambian girls but also risks undermining regional efforts against FGM/C and any other girls' issues like child marriage affecting collective progress across West and Central Africa.

As the joint committee of health and gender is now meeting with key Gambia stakeholders on the women amendment bill, the Joining Forces Coalition urgently calls for a halt of the repeal process

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<sup>1</sup> <https://information.tv5monde.com/terriennes/lexcision-nouveau-legalisee-en-gambie-2714402>



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of the vital 2015 anti-FGM law. We urge all Gambia stakeholders to join us in condemning this move and to work together to ensure the 2015 law remains in force, safeguarding the rights and lives of countless girls and women.

The Joining Forces Coalition reminds the Gambian government and sub-regional/panafrican organizations such as ECOWAS and African Union of the urgent need to maintain the Gambian state's progress and commitment to the rights of girls and women. The Joining Forces Coalition appeals to all governments in the West and Central African region to stand in solidarity against the repeal, protecting our collective future and the rights of every girl and woman. To do so, failure to act against this bill would amount to a failure on the part of the Gambia and the international community to protect the girls and women on whom so much of the planet's future depends. More than ever, girls and women need to live free from physical and moral violence.

The Joining Forces Coalition supports the commitment of the international community, ECOWAS, African Union, girls' and women's rights organizations, civil society in The Gambia known as "Call to Action", as well as opinion leaders from all walks of life who have stood up against the current draft of the Gambian National Assembly.

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

*For further information or interview requests, please contact:*

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### **About Joining Forces Coalition:**

Joining Forces is an alliance of six largest child-focused international NGOs: **ChildFund Alliance, Plan International, Save the Children International, SOS Children's Villages International, Terre des Hommes International Federation, and World Vision International.** Joined forces was created in 2017 and aims to use our collective power to accelerate change to secure children, their rights and end violence against them. We will pilot and scale innovative and effective approaches worldwide and be driven by the voices and needs of children.

