

**RE: Female Genital Mutilation and the Gambian Government**

April 2, 2024

To the Right Honourable Prime Minister, Minister Joly, Minister Ien, Minister Ng and Minister Hussen

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) was deeply troubled to learn of the recent decision by the Government of Gambia to reintroduce female genital mutilation (FGM) in their country. However, we were heartened by the swift response of Gambian women, who courageously rose up against the motion to send it to committee, leading to its postponement for three months.

Since 1992, NCWC has steadfastly advocated for legislative measures in Canada to criminalize FGM, educate the public about its health risks, prohibit the transportation of children outside the country for the purpose of undergoing this procedure, and holding individuals accountable for committing such acts abroad. We celebrated the passage of an amendment in 1997 that prohibited all forms of FGM in Canada. Our most recent submission in 2018 reiterated the urgent need to protect girls from this terrible procedure.

In December 2023, Gambian High Commissioner Bah presented his credentials to the Governor General, expressing gratitude for Canada's support and calling for an expansion of our country's development assistance. He emphasized the importance of collaboration between our nations, with which the Governor General responded that this will  *“see how the two countries can better work together to make the world a better place*.”

Given FGM is recognized as aggravated assault under the Criminal Code of Canada, we urge the Government of Canada to use its influence to protect the women and girls of Gambia. Furthermore, we urge Canada to factor in these brutal acts against females when formulating support to nations that have not prohibited FGM under their national laws.

Eliminating female genital mutilation is a critical step toward making the world a safer and more just place. Canada has a significant role to play in achieving this goal by exerting pressure on countries where this practice persists. Gambia, once a leader in banning female genital mutilation in 2015, stands to benefit greatly from Canada's wise counsel to uphold this ban and protect countless young girls from harm.

We urge you to take swift action to ensure that Canada continues to lead in the global effort to eradicate female genital mutilation. Your dedication to advancing human rights both domestically and internationally is deeply appreciated and makes a profound difference in the lives of countless individuals.

Sincerely,

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President

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