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PRESS CONFERENCE ON ADOPTION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION
ON GLOBAL EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

A groundbreaking resolution just adopted by the General Assembly on female genital mutilation would equip all States to combat those harmful practices, the representative of Burkina Faso, Der Kogda, announced at a Headquarters press conference today.

However, it would be the application on the ground that would give full force to the text, he said, expressing hope for a positive outcome after the two-year period set by the Assembly to review progress on the text's implementation.

Also attending the press conference was Mariam Lamizana, President, Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC) and Nicolo Figa Talamaca, Secretary-General of the non-governmental organization No Peace Without Justice.

After negotiations in a "very calm" atmosphere, Mr. Kogda said, the resolution, "strengthening the global effort to eradicate female genital mutilation", had been adopted by consensus. Sponsored by two thirds of the Member States, including the Group of African States, the text condemns the practice, recognizing it as harmful to women and girls and a serious threat to their health. States were also urged to condemn female genital mutilation to protect women against all forms of violence.

Such decisive action by Governments and African leaders, Mr. Kogda told reporters, was welcome. Mr. Figa Talamaca added that the African Union had already established a prohibition to the practice. However, the General Assembly's adoption of the resolution had increased that prohibition's global value. Moreover, a real change in the perception of female genital mutilation was occurring. "This is a human rights issue," he stressed, and not a public health or private matter.

Mr. Kogda took the opportunity to appreciate the work done by Mr. Figa Talamaca's organization, saying that the text would give new impetus to the movement at the national and civil society level, as well as within the United Nations system. Although resolutions adopted by the General Assembly were not binding, they had political force behind them which allowed Member States to embark in new directions. The global ban on female genital mutilation also gave legitimacy to activists on the ground.

Ms. Lamizana informed correspondents that currently 29 African countries were working on the issue, of which 19 had adopted appropriate legislation. However, although Burkina Faso followed the letter of the law, that was not the case in other countries. The resolution called for the establishment of mechanisms for enforcement, which would then allow for civil society organizations to bring lawsuits against practitioners.

In Burkina Faso, she said, the phone number "SOS-excision" had been established, along with a programme of information and communication developed with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which identified within communities individuals who were well known and trusted, and who could, through education strategies, work with the community to end the practice. She also pointed out that, because practitioners of female incisions tended to be older women in their community, judges were reluctant to impose prison sentences.

There was great social pressure surrounding the practice of female incision, Mr. Figa Talamaca said. The resolution adopted today aimed to reverse that pressure. As well, Ms. Lamizana added, all countries should work together to standardize their laws and coordinate their strategies. However, she assured correspondents: "We are eliminating, one by one, all the obstacles." In two years, she hoped evaluations would demonstrate those efforts.

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