



The Global Muslim Women's Shura Council  
**FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING: HARMFUL AND UN-ISLAMIC**

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A Statement of the Global Muslim Women's Shura Council  
(July, 2010)

The Global Muslim Women's Shura Council is a program of  
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## About the Global Muslim Women's Shura Council

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The Global Muslim Women's Shura Council is a global and inclusive council of Muslim women scholars, activists, and specialists. The Council endeavors to connect Islamic principles to society's most pressing issues and develop holistic strategies for creating positive social change.<sup>1</sup> **In the following statement, the Shura Council condemns female genital cutting a harmful practice that violates the teachings of Islam and suggests ways to eliminate it.** In doing so, the Shura Council is in accordance with the rising religious consensus on the issue, the views of the international human rights community, and published medical research.

### Introduction

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Female Genital Cutting (FGC) is a broad and somewhat problematic label that describes the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.<sup>2</sup> Unlike comparable practices that are undertaken in the medical context, such as genital plastic surgeries and non-elective genital modification for intersex infants, FGC describes procedures performed on a minor female for traditional or cultural reasons in non-medical contexts. This Shura Council statement uses The World Health Organization (WHO) criteria for the definition of FGC.

The World Health Organization classifies FGC into four major types, based on severity of excision.<sup>3</sup> FGC, therefore, describes a varied range of practices, including the following: slight pricking or nicking of the clitoral hood; hoodectomy (excision of the clitoral hood); clitoridectomy (excision of the clitoris); the excision of the clitoris and labia minora and majora; and infibulation (suturing) with excision of the external genitalia.

Commonly cited reasons for the practice include the faulty beliefs that FGC is "a good tradition" or a religious requirement or that it ensures "cleanliness" and prevents excessive clitoral growth. FGC is also deeply connected to marriage rituals and ideas about protecting virginity and preventing promiscuity.<sup>4</sup>

FGC is practiced openly in 28 different African countries, as well as secretly in parts of the Middle East, Europe, Australia, and the United States. Over 130 million women worldwide have been affected by some form of FGC, and three million girls are at risk every year. Most children are subjected to FGC

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Shura Council, please visit <http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/about/shuracouncil/>

<sup>2</sup> Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE) and the Shura Council prefer to use the term Female Genital Cutting (FGC) instead of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) out of respect for the millions of women and girls around the world who have undergone the procedure and live with its consequences. The Council recognizes that societies who employ this procedure do not do so with the intention of "mutilating" their females. The Shura Council considers the alternate term "Female Circumcision" to be inaccurate, because FGC procedures are not analogous to Abrahamic circumcision.

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization, "Female Genital Mutilation: Report of a WHO Technical Working Group" (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1995), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Reymond, Asha Mohamud, and Nancy Ali, "Female Genital Mutilation: The Facts," *The Path*, n.d., <http://www.path.org/files/FGM-The-Facts.htm>.

between the ages of four and ten years. However, there has been a recent downward shift in the age of victims, as parents try to reduce trauma to their children, avoid government interference, or forestall resistance from the children themselves.<sup>5</sup> Some women who escaped FGC during childhood may later undergo FGC as a prerequisite for marrying into a community.

FGC has been widely condemned by political and religious authorities and is banned by a broad network of local, national, and international laws. Countries with national laws against FGC include Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Ghana, Great Britain, Guinea, Sudan, Sweden, and the United States. In other countries, child abuse laws cover FGC. The governments of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Niger, Senegal, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda have declared their commitment to eradicating the practice.<sup>6</sup> The WHO, United Nations Children's Fund, and United Nations Population Fund have issued joint statements against FGC, recognizing it as a major human rights violation against girls and women.<sup>7</sup> Major international treaties that ban the practice include Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Convention on the Rights of the Child. Regional treaties that forbid the practice include The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the Banjul Charter) and its Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. High-level Islamic religious scholars from around the world have denounced FGC with legal opinions (*fatawa*). A 2005 report entitled, "Children in Islam: Their Care, Development and Protection," issued by UNICEF and the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research at Al-Azhar University, also strongly condemns the practice.<sup>8</sup>

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## FGC is Harmful

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Medical consequences of FGC include, but are not limited to, the following: death through shock and/or excessive bleeding; infection; sepsis; urine retention; ulceration of the genital region; injury to adjacent genital tissue; scarring; infertility; cysts; painful sexual intercourse; increased risk of transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS; and a range of resulting psychological and psychiatric problems.<sup>9</sup> Although all FGC procedures carry health risks, infibulation (suturing) with excision, which accounts for 10% of all FGC cases in Africa, is by far the most dangerous to children and women.<sup>10</sup> FGC procedures are often performed in unsterile environments and with little or no anesthesia. In areas of the world where medical facilities are ill-equipped or inaccessible, children who develop uncontrolled

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<sup>5</sup> "Female Genital Mutilation: The Facts," FORWARD: The Foundation for Women's Health, Research & Development (London, 2002), 3. See also F. Hosken, *The Hosken Report: Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females*, 4th ed. (Lexington: Women's International Network, 1993), 35.

<sup>6</sup> "Laws on FGM," DoSomething.org, <http://www.dosomething.org/tipsandtools/laws-fgm>.

<sup>7</sup> "Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation: An Interagency Statement," OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNECA, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIFEM, WHO, Department of Reproductive Health and Research (RHR), World Health Organization, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research, Al-Azhar University and Unicef, "Children in Islam: Their Care, Development and Protection," 2005. Available in Arabic and English summary at [http://www.unicef.org/egypt/media\\_2369.html](http://www.unicef.org/egypt/media_2369.html).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> "Female Genital Mutilation," World Health Organization (WHO), Fact sheet N°241, Feb 2010, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

bleeding or infection die within hours of the first incision.<sup>11</sup> Women who have undergone FGC are significantly more likely to die during childbirth and give birth to a stillborn child.<sup>12</sup> In fact, FGC-practicing regions have the world's highest maternal and infant mortality rates.<sup>13</sup>

Research suggests that FGC can be eliminated very rapidly if communities themselves decide to do so.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, FGC continues to endure because of cultural and political reasons and is often fallaciously justified on religious grounds.

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## FGC is Un-Islamic

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Muslim proponents of FGC often try to justify it on the basis of religion and the practice is widespread in several Muslim-majority countries. According to a UNICEF report based on Demographic and Health Surveys, FGC is most prevalent in the following countries: Guinea (99% prevalence in 1999); Egypt (97% rate of prevalence among ever-married women in 2003)<sup>15</sup>; Mali (92% percent in 2001); and northern Sudan (90% prevalence in 2000).<sup>16</sup> Somalia and Djibouti are estimated to have prevalence rates of around 90%. FGC is also common in several Christian-majority countries in Africa including Ethiopia, Kenya, and The Central African Republic (CAR).<sup>17</sup> In Burkino Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Niger, Muslim women are more likely than Christian women to have undergone FGC. However, in Kenya and Tanzania, the reverse is true, with a higher percentage of Christian women than Muslim women undergoing FGC.<sup>18</sup> Exposure is also determined by ethnicity, locale, and education.<sup>19</sup>

This diversity stems from the fact that FGC is a social and cultural practice, not a religious one. It predates the birth of both Islam and Christianity. Origins of the practice are unclear; however, it is generally traced to Pharaonic Egypt, based on evidence found on mummies.<sup>20</sup> FGC is virtually absent in many Muslim-majority countries, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, where it can be found mainly among

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<sup>11</sup> O. Koso-Thomas, *The Circumcision of Women: A Strategy for Eradication* (London: Dotesios Ltd., 1987), 29.

<sup>12</sup> WHO Study Group, "Female Genital Mutilation and Obstetric Outcome," *Lancet* 367.9525 (3 June 2006):1835.

<sup>13</sup> Hosken, *The Hosken Report: Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females*, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Tostan, "Abandoning Female Genital Cutting (FGC)," *Tostan.org*, <http://www.tostan.org/web/page/586/sectionid/547/pagelevel/3/interior.asp>.

<sup>15</sup> According to UNFPA, there has been a downward shift in these numbers among younger women. A recent 2008 Demographic Health Survey in Egypt (EDHS) reported that FGC prevalence rate among women from ages 15-49 is 91.1 percent; and 74 percent among girls age 15-17. "FGM/C in Egypt: Prevalence Rate and Prospects," UNFPA, [http://egypt.unfpa.org/english/fgmStaticpages/0c3b708e-9c55-4b05-994f-a437f89a81d9/Egypt\\_Prevalence\\_rate\\_and\\_Prospects.aspx](http://egypt.unfpa.org/english/fgmStaticpages/0c3b708e-9c55-4b05-994f-a437f89a81d9/Egypt_Prevalence_rate_and_Prospects.aspx).

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF, *Changing a Harmful Social Convention: Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting* (Florence: Unicef Inconti Research Center, 2005), 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> J. Muteshi and J. Sass, *Female Genital Mutilation in Africa: An Analysis of Current Abandonment Approaches* (Nairobi: PATH, 2005), 10.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 8-10.

<sup>20</sup> UNFPA, "Frequently Asked Questions on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting," <http://www.unfpa.org/gender/practices2.htm>.

immigrant populations.<sup>21</sup> It is performed by Christians, Muslims, and Jews, as well as by members of non-Abrahamic religions in the areas where it is common.<sup>22</sup>

FGC as it is currently practiced has been overwhelmingly condemned by religious authorities and rendered illegal by government statutes and international treaties. Based on every single source guiding Islamic ethics, it is clear that FGC is unjustifiable on Islamic grounds. These sources include the Qur'an, the example and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (*sunnah* and *hadith*), the objectives and principles of Muslim religious law (*maqasid al-shari'a*), religious consensus (*ijma*), legal opinions (*fatwa*), and analogical deduction (*qiyas*).

## I. FGC Contradicts The Holy Qur'an

The Qur'an does not specifically mention female genital cutting. However, the Qur'anic messages of health, justice, and compassion, which permeate the holy text, clearly contradict the practice of FGC. Several other Qur'anic verses strongly condemn acts that negatively affect the human body (2:195; 4:119; 30:30), as FGC clearly does. Furthermore, the Qur'an promotes mutual pleasure during marital sexual intercourse (2:187 and 30:21), which is severely limited by FGC.

According to the Qur'an, humans were created in "the best stature" (95:4). Therefore, the human body is to be left as it was created by God, unless there is an acceptable reason for interfering with it. "Tradition" is not an acceptable reason, as the Qur'an strongly condemns those who blindly follow harmful traditions:

*But when they are told, "Follow what God has bestowed from on high," some answer, "Nay, we shall follow [only] that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing." Why, even if their forefathers did not use their reason at all, and were devoid of all guidance? (2:170).*

Islam forbids all harmful and destructive cultural practices. One relevant example is female infanticide, which was "traditional" to pre-Islamic Arabia but came to be banned under Islam. The Qur'anic injunction against female infanticide and hurting innocents, therefore, is worth repeating here: "and when the girl child who was buried alive shall be asked 'for what sin was she killed'" (81: 8-9).

## II. FGC Contradicts the Prophet's Example and Words (Sunnah and Hadith)

There is no mention of any female members of the Prophet's household being cut, whereas there is evidence that his two grandsons, al-Hassan and al-Hussein, were circumcised at the age of seven days.<sup>23</sup>

The Prophet was exemplary in his kindness and gentleness towards all members of his family and is

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<sup>21</sup> Noor Kassamali, "Genital Cutting," in Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures: Family, Body, Sexuality and Health, eds. Suad Joseph and Afsaneh Najmabadi (Brill, 2005), 129-132.

<sup>22</sup> Carla Makhlouf Obermeyer, "Female Genital Surgeries: The Known, the Unknown, and the Unknowable," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 13.1 (1999): 79-106.

<sup>23</sup> Ibrahim Lethome Asmani and Maryam Sheikh Abdi, *De-linking Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting from Islam* (USAID, 2008), 7. Hereafter, Asmani and Abdi.

known to have said, "Whoever becomes the father of a girl, he should neither hurt her nor treat her with contempt."<sup>24</sup> Speaking of one of his daughters, the Prophet noted, "[she] is a part of my body, and I hate what she hates to see, and what hurts her, hurts me."<sup>25</sup>

Several hadith, the authenticity of which cannot be confirmed, mention female genital cutting. The hadith most commonly used by proponents of FGC is the following:

Um Atiyyat al-Ansariyyah said: "A woman used to perform circumcision in Medina. The Prophet (pbuh) said to her: "Do not cut too severely as that is better for a woman and more desirable for a husband."

This is considered a "weak" hadith and can be found in only one of the six hadith collections generally accepted as authentic.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, this hadith is not suitable for legal argumentation. In addition, there is also a great deal of contention as to its wording and interpretation.<sup>27</sup> Sayyid Sabiq, renowned scholar and author of *Fiqh-us-Sunnah*, has debunked as un-authentic every hadith concerning female circumcision.<sup>28</sup>

However, even if one were to entertain the possibility that this particular hadith is authentic, it does not justify FGC, because it does not encourage the practice, but instead curbs it: the Prophet is advising *against* cutting a woman's genitalia severely enough to harm her and her relations with her husband. All but the most symbolic forms of FGC would be banned on the basis of this supposedly sympathetic hadith alone, even if it were authentic.

According to the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research at Al-Azhar University, "the use of the general term 'Sunnah Circumcision' [for FGC] is nothing but a form of deceit to misguide people and give the impression that the practice is Islamic."<sup>29</sup>

### III. FGC is Not Supported by Legal Consensus (Ijma) or Legal Opinions (Fatwa)

There is no consensus within the four classical *fiqh* schools on FGC. Classical Islamic scholars who mention female circumcision allowed cutting only the uppermost skin of the clitoral prepuce.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Islam amounted to a regulation and curbing of a pre-existing practice. In keeping with this curbing, currently the majority of Muslims do not practice any form of female genital cutting.

In accordance with the principle of protecting life and in confirmation of the important hadith, "there

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<sup>24</sup> "Abdullah ibn Abbas (ra) reports that the Prophet (saw) said "Whoever becomes the father of a girl, he should neither hurt her nor treat her with contempt nor show preference over her to his sons in kindness and affection. Allah will grant him Paradise in return for kind treatment towards the daughter." Quoted in Mufti M. Mukarram Ahmed, *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2005), 74.

<sup>25</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, Volume 7, Book 62, Number 157.

<sup>26</sup> Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad, "Female Genital Mutilation: An Islamic Perspective," Minaret of Freedom Institute, MFI Pamphlet #1, 2000, <http://www.minaret.org/fgm-pamphlet.html>. See also Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, "Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): Debates about FGM in Africa, the Middle East & Far East," *Religious Tolerance.org*, [http://www.religioustolerance.org/fem\\_cirm.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/fem_cirm.htm)

<sup>27</sup> Asmani and Abdi, 8. Asmani and Abdi refute a few more weak and misunderstood hadith in pages 8-11.

<sup>28</sup> Muslim Women's League, "Position Paper on Female Genital Mutilation/Female Circumcision," 1999, <http://www.mwlusa.org/>.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Azhar University and Unicef, "Children in Islam: Their Care, Development and Protection," 9.

<sup>30</sup> Asmani and Abdi, 17.

should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm," Islamic law forbids any attack on the human body, including any form of corporal harm or sexual assault.<sup>31</sup> It is likely that scholars who have called FGC permissible (*mubaah*) were not aware of its harm, because only a cultural practice that does not hurt an individual or the society can be called permissible under Islamic law.<sup>32</sup> With the increase in scientific and medical knowledge on the effects of FGC on children, women, and families, extensive scholarly consensus has begun to form among contemporary scholars. Numerous learned fatwas have been issued against the practice worldwide, and an increasing tide of Islamic scholarship has been wearing down the cultural walls of FGC.

In a global 2006 conference, an impressive array of high-level Islamic religious scholars from around the world declared FGC to be both contrary to Islam and an attack on women.<sup>33</sup> Among the scholars present were Egypt's two top Islamic clerics: Dr. Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, the Grand Sheik of Al-Azhar, the foremost theological institute in the Sunni Muslim world, and Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa.<sup>34</sup> Other participants included Hamdi Mahmoud Zakzouk (the minister of religious affairs in Egypt), Sultan Abdelkader Mohamed Humad of Djibouti, and Sultan Ali Mirah Hanfary of Ethiopia, as well as distinguished scholars from Somalia, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Eritrea, Nigeria, Djibouti, Morocco, and Turkey.<sup>35</sup> Prominent religious scholar Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who had previously been ambivalent on the issue, noted that the Qur'an forbids the mutilation of God's creation and unequivocally declared, "We are on the side of those who ban this practice."<sup>36</sup>

In 2009, Egypt's Dār al-Iftā', the international flagship for Islamic legal research, released an extensive statement that denounced "female circumcision" as a harmful cultural rite: "Anyone who is acquainted with the reality of the matter cannot speak except in favor of its prohibition."<sup>37</sup>

In January 2010, a group of thirty-four West African Muslim scholars and clerics assembled for the purpose of issuing a fatwa against female genital cutting.<sup>38</sup> Other prominent scholars who have spoken against FGC include Sheikh Sayyid Sabiq, Sheik Mohammad Arafa, Sheikh Shaltoot, Sheikh Abubakar Aljazaairy, Dr. Su'ad Saleh, and Dr. Selim al-Awwa.

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<sup>31</sup> Al-Azhar University and Unicef, "Children in Islam: Their Care, Development and Protection," 9. Imam Nawawi, *40 Hadith*, chapter 1, no: 32

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>33</sup> Resolution of the Conference of Scholars in Cairo (November 22 and 23, 2006), issued on November 23, 2006, signed on November 24, 2006 by the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Prof. Dr. Ali Gomaa. Available [http://www.target-human-rights.de/HP-08\\_fatwa/index.php?](http://www.target-human-rights.de/HP-08_fatwa/index.php?)

<sup>34</sup> Professor Ali Gomaa Grand Mufti of Egypt, "Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)," November 24, 2006, <http://www.aligomaa.net/fatwacollection.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Emad Mekay, "Africa: Will FGM Fatwa Make a Difference?" Nov 29, 2006, *Inter Press Service*, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200611300282.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Amira El Ahl, "A Small Revolution in Cairo: Theologians Battle Female Circumcision," *Der Spiegel*, Dec 6, 2006, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,452790,00.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Dar-al Ifta al-Masriyyah, "Statement Issued by Dar-al-Ifta al-Masriyyah on Female Circumcision," Feb 4, 2009, <http://www.dar-alifta.org/viewStatement.aspx?ID=112&text=circumcision>

<sup>38</sup> Laura Smith-Gary, "Mauritania Islamic Scholars Issue Fatwa Against Female Genital Mutilation," *Equal Writes*, <http://equalwrites.org/2010/03/04/mauritania-islamic-scholars-issue-fatwa-against-female-genital-mutilation/>

Currently, religious scholars worldwide – including those in Egypt, Iraqi Kurdistan, Somalia, Gambia, and Kenya, to name a few – are working alongside health professionals and social workers to eradicate FGC.<sup>39</sup>

#### IV. FGC Cannot Be Supported by Analogy (*Qiyas*)

Proponents of FGC sometimes try to justify it by using *qiyas*, the Islamic legal tradition of analogy, arguing that FGC is analogous to male circumcision and therefore Islamic. However, FGC is not analogous to male circumcision for the following reasons:

As explained above, FGC has no basis in Islamic texts, in stark contrast to male circumcision.

1. Unlike male circumcision, FGC is practiced only by some Muslim communities, and even these disagree on the extent and parameters of the cutting. Had FGC been as connected to Islam as male circumcision, the extent of cutting would have been as clearly defined and the practice would have been equally widespread.
2. FGC cannot be compared to circumcision because what is cut in males is skin that has no essential function, whereas in females, functional organs are often removed and modified.<sup>40</sup>
3. There are proven medical benefits to male circumcision, but absolutely no benefits have been reported for FGC – on the contrary, only harm. For example, published medical research suggests that male circumcision is protective against STDs, including HIV/AIDS.<sup>41</sup> In stark contrast, FGC is directly correlated with the spread of STDs, including HIV/AIDS; it has been proven to play significant role in actually facilitating the transmission of HIV infection through numerous mechanisms.<sup>42</sup>

In fact, according to Dr. Su'ad Saleh of Al-Azhar University, FGC resembles not male circumcision but "the custom of burying girls alive, before the advent of Islam."<sup>43</sup>

#### V. FGC Contradicts the Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence (*maqasid al-shari'a*)

According to scholarly consensus, the six objectives and principles of Muslim religious law (*Shari'ah*) include the protection and promotion of religion (*al-din*), life (*al-nafs*), mind (*al-'aql*), family (*al-nasl*),

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<sup>39</sup> For Kurdistan, see Golnaz Esfandiari, "Iraq: Study Says Female Genital Mutilation Widespread In North," *Radio Free Europe*, Jan 21, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1057007.html> and "Female Circumcision Ban Urged," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Feb 11, 2010, [http://www.iwpr.net/index.php?p=icr&apc\\_state=hen&s=f&o=360088](http://www.iwpr.net/index.php?p=icr&apc_state=hen&s=f&o=360088); for Gambia, see "Gamcotrap Recruits Niani Elders In FGM Fight," *Today Newspaper*, Feb 24, 2010, <http://today.gm/hi/news/1594.html>; for Kenya, see Maryam Sheikh Abdi, "A Religious Oriented Approach to Addressing FGM/C/C among the Somali community of Wajir, Kenya," *FRONTIERS Report* (Nairobi: Population Council, 2007), [www.popcouncil.org/frontiers](http://www.popcouncil.org/frontiers); for Somalia, see "Somali Villages Publicly Abandon Female Genital Cutting," *Afrigator PR*, Oct 12, 2009, <http://pr.afrigator.com/business/legal/somali-villages-publicly-abandon-female-genital-cutting/>.

<sup>40</sup> Asmani and Abdi, 16-7.

<sup>41</sup> Donald G. McNeil Jr., "H.I.V. Risk Halved by Circumcision, U.S. Agency Finds" *NY Times*, Dec 14, 2006, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?sec=health&res=9905e0d71531f937a25751c1a9609c8b63>.

<sup>42</sup> M. Brady, "Female Genital Mutilation: Complications and Risk of HIV Transmission," *Aids Patient Care STDS* 12 (1999): 709-16.

<sup>43</sup> "Death of Girl During Circumcision Stirs Debate in Egypt and Prompts a Fatwa by Mufti of Egypt Banning this Practice," Transcript of program on Al-Mihwar TV, 2007-JUN-24, <http://www.memritv.org/>



wealth (*al-mal*), and dignity (*al-'ird*). FGC violates at least five of these principles:

**The Protection of Life:** FGC harms infants, girls, and women, endangering their lives and the lives of their future children.

**The Protection of Mind:** FGC harms girl's minds by undermining their mental and psychosexual health, causing psychosis and trauma.

**The Protection of Family:** FGC prevents the proper fulfillment of conjugal relations and precludes a mutually pleasurable sexual relationship between a husband and wife. Medical evidence clearly indicates that healthy sexual relationships promote health, stress relief, stronger immune systems, better sleep, and even longer life.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, FGC precludes these health benefits and has been linked to infertility and divorce.<sup>45</sup>

**The Protection of Dignity:** FGC harms women's dignity, condemning them to a life of serial infections and intimate scars.<sup>46</sup> Disfiguring genitalia, on the unproven assumption that it prevents promiscuity, denies humans their divine right to free will and dignity.

**The Protection of Religion:** In many cases, suturing and scars make it impossible for the cut female to attain ritual cleanliness (*tahara*), denying her the right to worship.<sup>47</sup> The unnecessary health problems caused by FGC prevent a woman from enjoying the two blessings the Prophet has praised: "health and free time for doing good."<sup>48</sup>

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## Conclusion and Recommendations

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The Shura Council absolutely and unconditionally condemns FGC as a harmful practice that contradicts both the spirit and the letter of Islam, violates international laws on children's rights and women's rights, and endangers populations in need.

The Shura Council underlines that even minor forms of FGC are not mentioned in the Qur'an, and, unlike male circumcision, even limited female hoodectomy has not been declared as sunnah by the Prophetic tradition. The Council also stands against the "medicalization" of the practice, that is, its execution by healthcare professionals in clinical settings.<sup>49</sup> Immediate risks associated with FGC are reduced but not

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<sup>44</sup> Doheny, Kathleen "10 Surprising Health Benefits of Sex" WebMD at <http://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/features/10-surprising-health-benefits-of-sex?page=3>; see also Stacy Tessler Lindau and Natalia Gavrilova, "Sex, Health, and Years of Sexually Active Life Gained Due to Good Health," *British Journal of Medicine*, BMJ 2010;340:c810 at [http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/340/mar09\\_2/c810](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/340/mar09_2/c810)

<sup>45</sup> Clement Oko Nnachi, "Nigeria: Female Circumcision in Igboland," *Nigerian Tribune*, reprinted by *FGM Education and Networking Project*, 2003, [http://www.fgmnetwork.org/gonews.php?subaction=showfull&id=1170937325&archive=&start\\_from=&ucat=1&](http://www.fgmnetwork.org/gonews.php?subaction=showfull&id=1170937325&archive=&start_from=&ucat=1&)

<sup>46</sup> Okumephuna Chinwe Celestine, "FGM: An Insult On The Dignity Of Women," Testimonial from Nigeria, *The FGM Education and Networking Project*, 2003 <http://www.fgmnetwork.org/articles/nigeria.php>.

<sup>47</sup> "Kenya: Islamic Scholars Find No Religious Justification for FGM/C," FRONTIERS OR, Summary no. 73 (Washington, DC: Population Council, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> "Narrated by Ibn 'Abbas: The Prophet said, "There are two blessings which many people lose: (They are) health and free time for doing good." (Sahih al-Bukhari, 8/421).

<sup>49</sup> "Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation: An Interagency Statement," 12.

eliminated when the practice is performed in modern medical facilities.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, there is no evidence that FGC creates fewer long-term complications when performed by health-care professionals.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the Council condemns this unnecessary and harmful practice in all its forms, in every context, worldwide.

Extensive religious, scholarly, and judicial consensus exists on all forms of FGC, deeming it both un-Islamic and in violation of children's and women's human rights as currently defined by the international community. Yet, activists have discovered that those living in areas where FGC is widespread still believe that FGC is mandated by religion; moreover, they are unaware that FGC is not practiced in most of the world.<sup>52</sup>

The Shura Council believes that the dissemination of religious information of FGC will help eliminate FGC, especially when combined with context-specific, culturally sensitive, grassroots measures. The Council suggests that activists seek the collaboration of local, national, and international religious authorities in the struggle to eliminate FGC.

### Campaigns and Activism

As a part of its ongoing *Jihad Against Violence* campaign, Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE) is collaborating with the Egyptian Association for Society Development (EASD), an NGO in Giza. WISE and EASD are working to eradicate FGC by providing religious education against the practice, as well as financial incentives and replacement economic activities for those currently performing FGC within the community.<sup>53</sup>

For more information about current campaigns, to connect with organizations and activists working to eradicate FGC, and to find tools for activism, please visit:

**<http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/currentissues/femalegenitalcutting>**

To see the work of the Global Muslim Women's Shura Council, please visit:

**<http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/about/shuracouncil/>**

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<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth Heger Boyle, *Female Genital Cutting: Cultural Conflict in the Global Community* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 33.

<sup>51</sup> "Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation: An Interagency Statement," 12.

<sup>52</sup> Forward UK, "Female Genital Mutilation," *Forward: Safeguarding Rights and Dignity*, June 28, 2010, <http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/key-issues/fgm>

<sup>53</sup> WISE, "WISE Press Release on International Day Against Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting," Feb 5, 2010, [http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/images/uploads/fgc\\_day.pdf](http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/images/uploads/fgc_day.pdf).