



**JOINT STATEMENT BY *Equality Now, Addu Women’s Association, Family Legal Clinic, Fem Health, Hope for Women, MV Rise Up, Uthema, and Women and Democracy***

**ON FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING (FGM/C)**

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) is a severe violation of human rights and an act of violence against women and girls. Global figures suggest genital mutilation is being practiced all over the world and is widespread. So far, at least over 200 million girls and women from 31 countries have undergone FGM/C according to World Health Organization (WHO) statistics, though official statistics do not account for numerous other countries where FGM/C is known to take place but there is no national-level data. Moreover, at least 2 million girls are also at risk of getting their genitals cut each year. Maldives is also among the countries which practice Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). It is motivated by beliefs about what is considered proper sexual behavior for women and what is necessary to prepare them for marriage. According to the Maldives Demographic & Health Survey 2016/2017, 13% of girls and women aged 15-49 have undergone FGM/C in Maldives.

FGM/C is a public health issue and a violation of a woman’s right to bodily integrity and autonomy. This practice has no health benefits and leads to a range of physical and mental health implications that can last a lifetime. Among this, immediate complications include severe pain, hemorrhage, tetanus or infection, urine infection and retention, ulceration of the genitals, fever and septicemia to name a few. Hemorrhage and infection can even be severe enough to cause death. Long-term consequences include complications during childbirth, anemia, infertility, sexual dysfunction, hypersensitivity of the genital area and increased risk of HIV transmission, as well as serious psychological effects.

We, Equality Now, Addu Women’s Association, Family Legal Clinic, Fem Health, Hope for Women, MV Rise Up, Uthema, and Women and Democracy, join together to reaffirm our commitment to ending this human rights violation and the gender inequalities that contribute to the prevalence of FGM/C around the world and in our communities in the Maldives. We condemn this heinous act towards girls and women and join our voices to call for zero tolerance to FGM/C. There must be zero-tolerance towards the promotion and advocacy of harmful practices that violate basic human rights. In any civilized society, it is unacceptable for public figures and those holding prominent posts in State institutions, educational establishments, as well as media sources used by their affiliated non-state organizations to attempt to normalize violence against girls and women. Lasting change to end harmful traditional practices must be led by the communities themselves, as they re-envision norms, values, safety, rights, and empowerment of women and girls. While the international community has made progress on ending FGM/C globally, there is still a long way to go. We must all work together to overturn deeply entrenched gender norms and harmful narratives about the value of the girl child that are not only detrimental to girls and women’s life chances, but the public health outcomes and socio-economic development of nations