



94-09-09: Statement of Inter-African Comm. on Traditional Practices..

The electronic preparation of this document has been done by the
 Population Information Network(POPIN) of the United Nations Population
 Division in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme

AS WRITTEN

STATEMENT OF MRS. B. RAS-WORK

INTER-AFRICAN COMMITTEE ON TRADITIONAL PRACTICES AFFECTING THE
 HEALTH OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

WITH REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND ITS HUMAN RIGHTS DIMENSIONS FEATURING
 PROMINENTLY ON THE AGENDA OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION
 AND DEVELOPMENT (ICPD), MY ORGANIZATION THE INTER-AFRICAN COMMITTEE ON
 TRADITIONAL PRACTICES AFFECTING THE HEALTH OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN WISHES
 TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO REITERATE ITS STRONG COMMITMENT TO THE
 PROMOTION OF ALL MEASURES AND ACTIONS TAKEN FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE
 HEALTH STATUS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN AFRICA AND ELSEWHERE IN THE
 DEVELOPING WORLD.

THE DRIVE TO CONTROL THE DECISION ON THE REPRODUCTIVE ROLE OF WOMEN HAS
 A LONG-STANDING HUMAN HISTORY WHICH LED THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM TO
 INTRODUCE VARIOUS MYTHS, TABOOS, AND PRACTICES WHICH AFFECT NEGATIVELY
 WOMEN AND GIRL CHILDREN. MISCONCEPTION AND STEREOTYPING SURROUND THE

FEMALE BODY AND ITS FUNCTIONS WITH THE ENSUING AGE OLD VALUE SYSTEMS MAINTAINED TO SUBJUGATE WOMEN AND RENDER THEM VULNERABLE TO ACCEPT SOCIAL SANCTIONS EVEN WHEN THE LATTER CLEARLY MILITATE AGAINST THEIR HEALTH AND BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS.

THROUGH TRADITIONAL TEACHING AND VALUE SYSTEMS WOMEN HAVE LEARNT TO ACCEPT SUBORDINATION AND ENCLUSION FROM MAKING DECISION INCLUDING THOSE INVOLVING THEIR HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE ROLE.

A REVIEW OF THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE AFRICAN GIRL CHILD WOULD FOR EXAMPLE SHOW AMPLY THE DISCRIMINATION AND THE GENDER BIAS SHE FACES RIGHT FROM HER BIRTH THROUGHOUT HER LIFE CYCLE. PREFERENTIAL TREATMENTS FOR THE BOY CHILD TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE GIRL CHILD ARE MAINTAINED IN FEEDING PRACTICES, SOCIALIZATION PROCESSES, RITUALS AND PRACTICES ARE PERFORMED ON GIRL CHILDREN AND MANY OF THESE PRACTICES ENDANGER THEIR LIVES. MY ORGANIZATION IS PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE PRACTICES OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION, CHILDHOOD MARRIAGE AND NIHITIONAL TABOOS.

SINCE ITS CREATION IN DAKAR SENEGAL IN 1984 AND WORKING THROUGH ITS NATIONAL AFFILIATES WHICH NUMBER 24 IN AFRICA, THE IAC HAS FOCUSED ON PROMOTING THE HEALTH OF WOMEN AND GIRL CHILDREN BY FIGHTING AGAINST HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES WHILE AT THE SAME TIME PROMOTING BENEFICIAL PRACTICES SUCH AS BREAST FEEDING AND CHILD SPACING.

THROUGH TRAINING PROGRAMMES, INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS, RESEARCH, PRODUCTION OF EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AND ADVICACY, IAC AIMS AT EMPOWERING WOMEN TO VALORIZE THEIR BODY AND TO GIVE PRIORITY TO THEIR OWN HEALTH.

WITH ITS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES, IAC TRIES TO DEMISIFY THE TABOOS

SURROUNDING THE FEMALE BODY AND ITS REPRODUCTIVE FUNCTIONS. FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION AFFECTS UP TO 100 MILLION WOMEN WITH AT LEAST 2 MILLION GIRLS BELIEVED TO UNDERGO THIS RITUAL OPERATION EVERY YEAR. MOST OF THE VICTIMS ARE AFRICANS IN AT LEAST 26 COUNTRIES ALTHOUGH THE PRACTICE EXISTS IN SOME COUNTRIES IN ASIA AND, AT PRESENT, WITH THE PHENOMENON OF MIGRATION IT, EXISTS IN EUROPE, CANADA AND THE U.S.A.

THE LONG AND SHORT TERM COME CONSEQUENCES OF THIS PRACTICE ARE DOCUMENTED BY WHO HEMORRHAGE, INFECTION, AND KELOID FORMATION, SHOCK, INFERTILITY TEARING DURING DELIVERY WITH SOMETIMES RUPTURE OF THE VAGINAL WALLS ETC. ARE REGISTERED. THE REASONS FOR THE PERSISTENCE OF THE PRACTICE ARE:

A - THE GENERAL SUBJUGATION OF WOMEN B - RELIGIOUS MISCONCEPTION C - ENSURING FERTILITY, CLEANLINESS AND REDUCING PROMISCUITY D - VIRGINITY E - LACK OF EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

FGM IN ITS COMPLEXITY INVOLVES VIOLATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN, AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD.

IAC IS ALSO GRAVELY CONCERNED BOUT THE PRACTICE OF CHILDHOOD MARRIAGE AND EARLY PREGNANCY. GIRLS ARE MARRIED AT AN EARLY AGE AND ARE PREGNANT AT EARLY PUBERTY. MOTHERS SO YOUNG HAVE NOT HAD THE TIME TO FINISH THEIR OWN PHYSICAL GROWTH AND AS A RESULT THERE IS COMPETITION IN NUTRITION BETWEEN THE FOETUS AND THE YOUNG MOTHERS AND THIS LEADS TO NUTRITIONAL DEFICIENCY FOR THE MOTHER AND THE BABY. THE MOST SERIOUS COMPLICATION FOR THE YOUNG MOTHER IS OBSTRUCTED LABOUR WHICH OCCURS WHEN THE BABY IS TOO BIG FOR THE ORIFICE OF THE MOTHER. OBSTRUCTED LABOUR CAN PROVOKE VESICO VAGINA FISYULA LEADING TO INCONTINENCE WITH THE

ENSUING SOCIAL REJECTION AND ISOLATION.

A RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN BY IAC IN SOME REGIONS OF ETHIOPIA SHOWS THAT GIRLS AS YOUNG AS 8 YEARS ARE FORCED INTO MARRIAGE AND ARE PRACTICALLY RAPED BY THEIR HUSBANDS.

THE ISSUE OF TRADITIONAL PRACTICES IS GRADUALLY GAINING INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION AS A RESULT OF THE EFFORTS EXERTED BY NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION. THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD CONTAINS AN ARTICLE WHICH PROTECTS CHILDREN FROM PREJUDICIAL PRACTICES.

THE DOCUMENT ADOPTED BY THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS HELD IN VIENNA IN 1993 RECOGNIZED SUCH VIOLENCE AS FGM AS A MAJOR OBSTACLE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN.

IT IS ALSO ENCOURAGING TO NOTE THAT THE DRAFT PROGRAMME OF ACTION OF THIS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT REFLECTS THE PROBLEM OF TRADITIONAL PRACTICES SUCH AS FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MARRIAGE AS ISSUES OF REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH.

MY ORGANIZATION WISHES TO REITERATE ITS CALL FOR A CONSOLIDATED ACTION BY GOVERNMENTS AS WELL AS NGOS TO ERADICATE HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES.

TO THIS END, THE FOLLOWING MEASURES ARE PROPOSED FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION:

- a - ADOPTION OF CLEARLY FORMULATED POLICIES FOR ABOLISHING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION AND FOR RAISING THE AGE OF MARRIAGE.
- b - INTENSIFICATION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION AND INFORMATION, MOBILIZATION OF THE MEDIA AND BOTH TRADITIONAL AND MODERN.

c - IMPLEMENTATION OF RELATED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES FOR HEALTH WORKERS,
TRADITIONAL BIRTH ATTENDANTS AND ALSO POLICY MAKERS.

d - INTEGRATION OF INFORMATION ON TRADITIONAL PRACTICES IN ONGOING PROGRAMMES
FOR THE PROMOTION OF SAFE MOTHERHOOD.

MR. CHAIRMAN, I HOPE THESE PROPOSALS WILL RECEIVE DUE CONSIDERATION BY
THE HONOURABLE DELEGATES.

I THANK YOU

For further information, please contact: popin@undp.org
POPIN Gopher site: <gopher://gopher.undp.org/11/ungophers/popin>
POPIN WWW site: <http://www.undp.org/popin>