

## Statement on the Women's (Amendment) Bill 2024 in The Gambia

17 July 2024

We welcome the decision of the National Assembly of the Republic of The Gambia on 15 July 2024 to uphold the national ban on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and to reject the Women's (Amendment) Bill 2024, which was tabled in March 2024 to repeal the provisions in the Women's Act that were introduced by the Women's (Amendment) Act 2015 to explicitly prohibit FGM, in compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) read in conjunction with General Recommendations Nos. 14 (1990), 24 (1999), 31 (2014), as well as No. 35 (2017), updating General Recommendation No. 19, of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

The vote is a testament to the determination and tenacity of Gambian women and girls, women civil society organizations and their allies, who have spared no effort to ensure that the ban on FGM is upheld, and with it, the right of women and girls in The Gambia to live a life that is free from gender-based violence. We salute the strong message that The Gambia and Gambian society passed to the international community: that women and girls have an unequivocal right not to be subjected to FGM under any circumstances, in line with The Gambia's obligations under international and regional human rights law.

By maintaining the ban on FGM, The Gambia safeguarded hard-won rights and ensured that FGM continues to be recognized internationally as a harmful practice that constitutes torture and a severe form of gender-based violence against women and girls with lifelong health risks. Overturning the law would have created a dangerous precedent rolling back on women's rights to life, health, safety, physical integrity, bodily autonomy, privacy, dignity and freedom from gender-based violence and torture, and its impact would have been felt beyond The Gambia. The historic win served as an opportunity to reaffirm the commitment to ending FGM as well as to double the efforts to enforce the law banning FGM, to improve the delivery of protection, assistance and counseling to survivors, and to raise awareness.

Experts have been in close contact with the Gambian Government and other stakeholders in The Gambia since the Women's Amendment Bill of 2024 was introduced. In May 2024, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and UN Women organized a roundtable with key stakeholders in the Gambia to discuss the proposed repeal of the FGM law. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls also participated in the roundtable, which established an *Ad Hoc* Committee and adopted several recommendations to address the resistance against the FGM law and to promote gender equality.

***[\\*The experts: Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Dorothy Estrada Tanck \(Chair\), Laura Nyirinkindi \(Vice-Chair\), Claudia Flores, Ivana Krstić, and Haina Lu, Working group on discrimination against women and girls; Mama Fatima Singhateh, Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children; Alice Jill Edwards, Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; Ana Peláez Narváez \(Chair\), Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.](#)***

*The Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts and Working Groups are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special*

*Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.*

*Some of the experts listed are members of the [Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women](#) (EDVAW Platform), which gathers seven UN and regional independent expert mechanisms dedicated to addressing discrimination and violence against women and girls, promoting accountability, and advancing women's and girls' rights at the international and regional levels. The Platform aims to strengthen institutional links and thematic co-operation between the mechanisms with a view to developing harmonised strategies and undertaking joint action. By enhancing collaboration, its goal is to improve the implementation of the existing international and regional legal and policy frameworks developed to end discrimination and violence against women and to make these mechanisms more visible and accessible to all.*