



## STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

### Stop FGM in the Middle East and Asia

The Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC) expresses deep concern in response to the continued ignorance of the problem of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) across the Middle East and Asia. A first step to combatting FGM is to recognise that the issue exists. To date FGM is regarded by most, including many international organisations as an African issue, but in reality it is also common in many Middle East and Asian countries such as Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, the Maldives, the Philippines and on the Arabian Peninsula. The UN ban on FGM in 2012 gave a good backing for activism against the practice in Asia. At the same time, the continuous neglect of the existence of FGM in West and South East Asia at an international level is stifling the efforts of local activists.

Research conducted by Unicef suggests in some provinces of Iraq a prevalence of almost 60%<sup>1</sup>. In Iran, the practice seems to be widespread among different Sunni minorities with rates between 55% and 80%<sup>2</sup>. Regional studies in Malaysia show a prevalence of 50-90%. A pre-study in Oman showed 78% prevalence<sup>3</sup>. In Indonesia, a USAID study suggests that 86-100% of girls are mutilated<sup>4</sup>. For Pakistan, India, Thailand, Singapore, the Maldives, the Philippines and countries on the Arabian Peninsula other than Oman and Yemen, no studies measuring prevalence have yet been conducted. However, in many of these countries human rights activists and bloggers have voiced their concern, and in India actions and demonstrations against FGM have already taken place. Unlike in Africa where anti-FGM campaigning started decades ago, in almost all of these Asian countries awareness raising and debate have only started recently, if at all.

The importance of combating this practice extends beyond the protection of human rights. Gender-based violence (including domestic violence, FGM, honour killings and child marriage) is at the core of the marginalisation and oppression of women, which has long been recognised as a major obstacle to human development in the region.

The BHRC calls upon all international organisations and governments to recognise the prevalence of FGM as a serious issue across the Middle East and Asia and to support programmes which seek to end such violence against girls.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=2584:female-genital-mutilation-fgm-a-survey-on-knowledge-attitudes-and-practice-among-households-in-the-iraqi-kurdistan-region&Itemid=626&lang=en](http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=2584:female-genital-mutilation-fgm-a-survey-on-knowledge-attitudes-and-practice-among-households-in-the-iraqi-kurdistan-region&Itemid=626&lang=en)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stopfgmmideast.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Iran-FGM-Child-Marriage-2014.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.stopfgmmideast.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/habiba-al-hinai-female-genital-mutilation-in-the-sultanate-of-oman1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.taskforcefgm.de/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/FGM\\_in\\_Indonesien.pdf](http://www.taskforcefgm.de/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/FGM_in_Indonesien.pdf)

## NOTES

1. The BHRC has submitted reports on FGM to the UK Parliamentary Inquiry into FGM, the UK Ministry of Justice Consultation on Civil Orders for FGM and the UN OHCHR consultation 'Towards a Better Investment in the Rights of the Child'. As a result of this work the UK Government has put legislation in place in the form of Civil Protection Orders for those at risk of FGM and this legislation is now being implemented in court.
2. WADI is an Iraqi-German organisation that has worked to promote human rights and democracy in the Middle East for over 20 years. Since 2005 it has been carrying out a successful campaign in the Kurdish region of Iraq. Starting with small workshops and extending to law advocacy, law enforcement, a media campaign and the training of midwives and policemen, WADI's comprehensive approach has resulted in a steep drop in support for the practice with 70% of citizens of the Kurdish region now opposed to FGM. Very active anti-FGM activism is also taking place in Iran including workshops for women and law and religious ruling (fatwa) advocacy. In the context of the campaign, local activists are supported in their struggle against FGM financially, logistically and with know-how, currently in Oman, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Malaysia. Furthermore a self-supportive network is being built up which currently includes eight countries, but will be extended to all affected countries in the Middle East and Asia. The Stop FGM Middle East initiative also lobbies for international recognition of FGM in Asia because pressure from the international community will in many cases open channels to the government for local activists. More information about the Stop FGM Middle East Campaign can be found at [stopfgmmideast.org](http://stopfgmmideast.org)