

Traditional Leaders in Liberia Make Historic Announcement Declaring Ban on Female Genital Mutilation

Chairperson of the National Council of Chiefs & Elders in Liberia, Chief Zanzan, has made a historic announcement, declaring FGM is banned across Liberia.

MONROVIA, LIBERIA, February 9, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Safe Hands for Girls](#) - represented by the UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Jaha Dukureh - and [Equality Now](#) wish to congratulate Chief Zanzan Karwor, the Chairperson of the National Council of Chiefs and Elders in Liberia, and the entire council for declaring a ban on female genital mutilation (FGM) in Liberia on the 6th of February 2023.



Traditional leaders at celebration in Liberia, International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, photo credit - Safe Hands for Girls, Alhagie Manka

In a groundbreaking declaration made on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, Chief Zanzan, with the authorization of 15 paramount Chiefs across Liberia, [declared](#), “By the power vested in me by all the Paramount Chiefs of the 15 political divisions in Liberia and signed by myself... FGM is banned in Liberia.”

Chief Zanzan on the occasion explained that the elaborate ceremonies and rituals undertaken in the lead-up to the Zero Tolerance Day celebration were carried out in order to get authorization from the zoes (the traditional cutters who perform FGM), elders, and chiefs to ban the practice in the whole country.

The momentous pronouncement was made at an event held in Songay town, Liberia, and was witnessed and supported by high-level officials, including Vice President Hon. Jewel Howard-Taylor, Minister for Gender Children and Social Protection Hon. Williametta E.Saydee-Tarr, UN Women Regional Goodwill Ambassador for Africa Jaha Dukureh, and members from the diplomatic corps representing the European Union, United States of America, Sweden, Norway,

Cuba, and Nigeria representing the ECOWAS community.

Also present was the Liberia Country Representative of UN Women, which has supported the establishment of heritage centers – including in Songay town, where the celebrations were held – to serve as a place for alternative livelihood for the zoes who are abandoning the practice.

"The traditional leaders have paved the way for us by giving us the first step in the journey to ending FGM in Liberia. We are greatly honored and thank them," Vice President of Liberia, Hon. Jewel Howard-Taylor said in appreciation of the trailblazing declaration.



Traditional leaders at celebration in Liberia, International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, photo credit - Safe Hands for Girls, Alhagie Manka

We acknowledge the efforts made over the years towards ending FGM in Liberia and wish to congratulate the Government leadership in this area, members of Liberian Civil Society, and the broader human rights community. We believe that their collective efforts have brought us to this moment, including through the destigmatization of discussions about FGM in the public space. We laud and commend all who have been part of the journey.

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*Chief Zanzan Karwor,
National Council of Chiefs and
Elders in Liberia*

The declaration by Chief Zanzan Karwor gives this campaign much needed impetus as it is at the heart of the matter. The custodian and practitioners of the harmful practice of FGM, in a public display of courage, with pomp

and circumstance, are laying down their tools and choosing to ‘evolve’ their culture to initiate girls but not mutilate them.

We hope that this laudable effort by the traditional leaders also acts as a fillip for Liberian Parliament to finally pass an anti-FGM law, and we pledge our support, in turn, to work towards robust legislation against FGM in Liberia and ultimately towards zero cases of FGM in the country.

FGM in Liberia:

- FGM is a harmful traditional practice involving the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It can cause immense physical and psychological damage and is internationally recognized as a grave violation of women's and girls' human rights.

- According to figures released by UNICEF in February 2020, at least 200 million women and girls have undergone FGM in 31 countries worldwide. This figure only includes states where there is available data from large-scale representative surveys, incorporating 27 countries from the African continent, together with Iraq, Yemen, the Maldives, and Indonesia, though we have evidence of FGM taking place in at least 92 countries worldwide.

- Around 31.8% of women and girls in Liberia have undergone FGM.

- Liberia is one of only four countries in Africa that have yet to specifically criminalize FGM, alongside Somalia, Mali, and Sierra Leone.

- Without legal bans that expressly criminalize and punish FGM, and prohibit it for both women and minors, the United Nations says it is not possible to provide "accountability frameworks and disciplinary sanctions" essential for prevention and eradication.

- Liberia is a signatory to international and regional human rights treaties, such as CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol, which call on State Parties to protect women and girls from all forms of violation, including FGM.

- In 2018, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf signed Executive Order No 92 on Domestic Violence banning FGM for one year. This Order only prohibited performing FGM on girls under age 18.

- In February 2022, the head of the Traditional Council of Liberia, Chief Zanzan Karwor announced a three-year suspension on FGM.



**SAFE HANDS
FOR GIRLS**



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- Liberia's President George Weah has made a public declaration about his support for ending FGM. In his State of the Nation Address on January 31, President Weah spoke about buttressing efforts to end FGM by opening up new traditional centers and setting up alternate livelihood programs for Zoes and traditional leaders, who receive payment for performing FGM. Part of the strategy is to find them alternative sources of income generation. The President thanked Chief Zanzan Karwor, the Chairperson of the National Council of Chiefs and Elders in Liberia, for his work on ending FGM.

ABOUT SAFE HANDS FOR GIRLS: Safe Hands for Girls is a survivor-led nonprofit organization dedicated to ending harmful traditions within the continent of Africa and beyond. Founded in 2013 by Jaha Dukureh, a survivor of both FGM and child marriage, Safe Hands for Girls is committed to supporting survivors and communities to lead the change when it comes to ending FGM, through youth education, community mobilization, and working with religious and traditional leaders, civil society, and survivors.

ABOUT EQUALITY NOW: Founded in 1992, Equality Now is an international human rights organization that works to protect and promote the rights of all women and girls around the world. Our campaigns are centered on four program areas: Legal Equality, End Sexual Violence, End Harmful Practices, and End Sexual Exploitation, with a cross-cutting focus on the unique needs of adolescent girls. Equality Now combines activism with international, regional, and national legal advocacy to achieve legal and systemic change to benefit all women and girls and works to ensure that governments enact and enforce laws and policies that uphold their rights.

Equality Now is a global organization with partners and members around the world. You'll find our 70+ team across the world in places such as Benin, Beirut, London, Geneva, San Jose, New York, Nairobi, Tbilisi, and Washington DC, among others.

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