

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights holds first-ever hearing on female genital mutilation in the Americas

The Inter-American Commission On Human Rights Highlights Female Genital Mutilation As An Urgent Regional Human Rights Concern.

MIAMI, FL, UNITED STATES, November 19, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- For the first time in its history, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has publicly addressed female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) within the Americas. At a landmark hearing in Miami on

November 17, 2025, IACHR Commissioners listened to testimonies from survivors, Indigenous leaders, and medical and legal experts from Colombia, the United States, and Canada, who are calling for urgent, coordinated government action to prevent, study, and respond to this extreme form of violence against women and girls.

The IACHR is the human rights arm of the Organization of American States (OAS), the body that brings together countries from across the Americas to promote democracy and human rights. By placing FGM/C on its agenda, the IACHR has formally recognized it as a regional concern and has signaled to governments that they have a responsibility to prevent and respond to this internationally recognized human rights violation.

"The IACHR recognizes FGM/C as a harmful practice and as an expression of harmful gender stereotypes, gender inequality, and the subordination of women and girls, as well as a violation of the right to a dignified life," said Commissioner Roberta Clarke, Rapporteur on the Rights of Women.

EVIDENCE SHOWS FGM/C HAPPENS IN THE AMERICAS

FGM/C involves the partial or complete removal of external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. It has no health benefits and can result in severe immediate and long-term physical and



Photo credit: Equality Now

psychological harm.

[FGM/C is documented in at least 94 countries globally](#), yet 39% do not have laws explicitly prohibiting it, including some countries in the Americas, such as Colombia, and nine US states. These alarming findings come from a global assessment of FGM/C featured in a joint 2025 report by the End FGM European Network, Equality Now, and The U.S. End FGM/C Network.

The IACHR's hearing on FGM/C, held during the Commission's 194th Period of Sessions, marked recognition that this harmful practice is not confined to Africa or Asia but also occurs in the Americas. Commissioner Gloria Monique de Mees highlighted how FGM/C is still widely seen as something "out there, not something that affects the Americas," reinforcing the need to address it formally within an inter-American context.

Kaitlin Mitchell from the U.S. End FGM/C Network noted that around 577,000 women and girls have undergone or are at risk of undergoing FGM/C in the US, yet awareness and implementation of existing laws remain weak. Further, Anastasia Law from Equality Now warned of policy directives and a federal bill seeking to conflate FGM/C with gender-affirming healthcare for transgender minors, which could weaken the legitimacy of current laws against FGM/C, "erode legal coherence, generate confusion among service providers, and undermine community trust."

In Colombia, government data indicate at least 204 cases of FGM/C between 2020 and 2025, primarily among Indigenous Embera girls. These include the [recent deaths](#) of a 13-year-old girl and a 23-day-old baby in Bogotá. In Canada, between 96,000 and 161,000 women and girls are believed to be impacted.

The 2025 global report on FGM/C also highlighted the historical presence of FGM/C in Panama, Mexico, and Peru, where documentation suggests the practice may occur within certain Indigenous communities; though there is insufficient data to determine current prevalence.

From Colombia, Indigenous Embera Chami leader and Director of Akubadaura, Lina Marcela Tobón Yagarí, stressed, "Eradicating this practice must be built through dialogue between the Colombian State and Indigenous peoples, because this requires cultural transformations. It is essential to avoid imposed measures that generate greater tensions and deepen the structural discrimination that exists against Indigenous women."

Forensic expert Dr Leonardo Quintero Suárez, of the National Institute of Legal Medicine of Colombia, explained that FGM/C in Colombia is usually performed within the first 15 days of life without anesthesia, and stressed that authorities often lack the tools to intervene in time.

Quintero Suárez spoke of the urgent need for lawmakers in Colombia to pass a bill to address FGM/C and improve the State's capacity to protect girls at risk, provide services, and gather data on the practice to increase understanding and track the impact of interventions. A bill has been

approved in the Chamber of Representatives and is pending debate in the Senate.

REGIONAL ALLIANCE URGES STRONGER STATE ACTION ON FGM/C

The [Americas Alliance to End FGM/C](#), which is made up of national, regional, and international organizations, including the US End FGM/C Network, Sahiyo, End FGM Canada Network, and Equality Now, as well as the Colombian organization Akubadaura, urged the Commission to issue clear regional guidance and call on governments to strengthen data and legal frameworks on FGM/C.

They also emphasized the importance of allocating dedicated budgets for prevention and survivor services, and of improving coordination between justice, health, and Indigenous governance systems to ensure culturally informed responses that protect women and girls at risk. Effective responses must also account for the intersecting forms of discrimination that heighten vulnerability, particularly for Indigenous and marginalized communities.

Leandra Becerra from Equality Now stated, “Across the Americas, what is missing are concrete State commitments to address FGM/C: reliable data, clear legal frameworks, and stable budgets. Regional guidance from the Inter-American system can help define the baseline that States must meet to ensure protection for girls.”

NEXT STEPS TO PROTECT WOMEN AND GIRLS FROM FGM/C

What the region now needs from the IACHR is clear guidance that helps States strengthen how they identify, prevent, and respond to FGM/C. Regional standards can support governments in improving data collection, adopting precise legal definitions, coordinating across health, justice, and Indigenous governance systems, and allocating stable resources for prevention and survivor services. This would give advocates and communities stronger reference points when calling for effective national action to protect women and girls from FGM/C.

ENDS

About Equality Now: Equality Now is a worldwide human rights organization dedicated to securing the legal and systemic change needed to end discrimination against all women and girls. Since its inception in 1992, it has played a role in reforming 120 discriminatory laws globally, positively impacting the lives of hundreds of millions of women and girls, their communities and nations, both now and for generations to come.

Working with partners at national, regional, and global levels, Equality Now draws on deep legal expertise and a diverse range of social, political, and cultural perspectives to continue to lead the way in steering, shaping, and driving the change needed to achieve enduring gender equality, to the benefit of all.

About the Americas Alliance to End FGM/C: The Americas Alliance to End FGM/C is a regional coalition working to eliminate female genital mutilation or cutting across North, Central, and South America. The Alliance brings together survivor advocates, civil society organisations, researchers, and service providers to strengthen data, improve prevention strategies, and support survivors through trauma-informed and culturally sensitive approaches. Founded by the US End FGM/C Network, Sahiyo, End FGM Canada Network, Equality Now and the George Washington University, the Alliance promotes cross-border cooperation and coordinated action to ensure that governments across the Americas uphold their human rights obligations and protect women and girls at risk.

Tamara Rusansky
Equality Now
+55 21 99966-3828
[email us here](#)

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