

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**On International Day of Zero Tolerance of Female Genital Mutilation,  
Graduate Women International urges stronger government action**

**Geneva, Switzerland, 6 February 2020**—International Day of Zero Tolerance of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) was first introduced in 2003 by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly as part of the UN’s efforts to promote the eradication of FGM. Today, Graduate Women International (GWI) stresses that unless governments and local leaders accelerate action to eliminate FGM, 68 million girls will be mutilated from now until 2030 (UNICEF), and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality will not be met.

With that in mind, GWI welcomes the [international strategy](#) 2019-2023 launched by Norway on 14 January 2020 which aims to enhance efforts to eliminate harmful practices like FGM, child marriage and son preference by cooperating on activities related to education, health care, gender equality and human rights.

“This strategy demonstrates strong international will to commit to eliminating harmful practices like FGM,” states GWI President, Terry Oudraad. “However, this strategy is focused on eliminating harmful practices in countries where they traditionally occur, which neglects that with continuous migration, these practices spread over to regions and countries where people are unaware of them.”

Indeed, [in Europe](#), it is estimated that 180,000 women and girls are at risk of FGM, while 500,000 women have already undergone some form of FGM (European Institute for Gender Equality). Yet, many challenges hamper the development of adequate national and European policies on FGM. Deficient data, research and knowledge of the issue are the primary catalysts that can be overcome with increased commitment.

GWI, therefore, urges all governments to increase understanding and awareness of FGM and what it entails to support non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and grass root organisations in tackling FGM and to implement a coordinated education-based and child-focused approach in all areas relating to eliminating FGM. To that effect, the GWI General Assembly adopted in 2016 [Policy Resolution 6](#) on ending FGM, which impels GWI’s national affiliates to encourage their governments to enact legislation to criminalise FGM and any actions related to it. The United Nations Population Fund estimates that this is the case for 59 countries so far. However, GWI highlights that a more coordinated effort is necessary to tackle the underlying socioeconomic causes, the greatest one being poverty, that trigger FGM. GWI, for instance, sees a successful approach to ending FGM in its primary mission of empowering women through education, because it enables women and girls to economically emancipate themselves.

GWI is a membership-based international NGO located in Geneva, Switzerland, with a presence in over 60 countries. Founded in 1919, GWI is the leading girls’ and women’s global organisation advocating for women’s rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels. GWI is in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947 and maintains official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

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Contributing to the press release is Anna Indermaur, GWI Intern.