

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) and other human rights bodies on Friday released a joint general comment to eliminate female genital mutilation (FGM) on the African continent.

The general comment launched at the African Union in Addis Ababa, will serve as a tool for member states, policy makers and legislators through providing guidance on how to align their laws and policies to international standards.

Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie, the Vice Chairperson of ACHPR observed that the document was developed through collaborative efforts with ACERWC on a mandate by the African Union Commission.

Commissioner Sallah-Njie said that this will provide a unified platform to advocate for rights of girls and women, as well as a guiding tool for AU member states to provide concrete action.



*Commissioner Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie, the Vice Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights*

FGM is defined as those procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. This often leads to adverse health effects like excessive bleeding, severe pain, infection and even death among other negative outcomes.

Addressed as a child and women rights issue, female genital mutilation is said to have wounded an estimated 200 million girls and women who are still living today. The practice which leaves mental and physical harm to victims is most prevalent on the continent.

The Special Rapporteur on Child marriage and Other Harmful Practices, Hermine Kembo said the joint general comment on FGM comes at the right time when African states understand the harmful nature of this practice.

"Many AU Member States have made significant progress in ensuring the reduction of FGM through the adoption of laws criminalizing FGM and the development of national initiatives to end FGM," Kembo said.

Kembo requested various stakeholders to develop a child-friendly version of the joint general comment like translating into local languages to allow all children to understand its content.



*Special Rapporteur on Child marriage and Other Harmful Practices, Hermine Kembo*

During the launch event, expert speakers from some African countries where FGM is practiced, representatives from civil society and international organizations highlighted ways and possibilities to end the practice.

Experts called upon states, religious and local leaders to exert their influence to end the practice through education, awareness and community engagements.

The launch heard that religion does not mandate or support FGM, this was in reference to some religious communities that prevalently practice FGM.

The responsibility of governments to protect children from harm or perceived harm was unilaterally echoed. African states were urged to enact laws and set up mechanisms to protect the future of the continent from harm.



Representatives from UNICEF, UNFPA and Plan International committed to continue in the fight against FGM, but they underlined that their approach will continue to be accorded to what member states are doing.

UNFPA said they will continue to deliver global promise to end FGM by 2030.

The representative of CSOs working in this space, highlighted the issue of limited resources and funding gaps to deal with this practice that is sometimes deep-rooted in social, cultural norms and beliefs.

Commissioner Sallah-Njie noted that, now is a critical time and dissemination of the joint general comment on FGM at all levels is crucial for its implementation. She invite all stakeholders to work with the AU human rights bodies to ensure the effective implementation of the recommendations provided in the document.