

## **GWJ calls for an end to Female Genital Mutilation as a major barrier to girls' and women's education and as a human rights abuse**

*Geneva, Switzerland, 6 February 2016*- on the International Day of Zero Tolerance of FGM, GWJ calls for states, policymakers and community members to put an end to the damaging practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as a form of physical abuse, a human rights abuse and as a major barrier to girls' educational attainment.

FGM is used as a form of social control over young girls and women, attracting stigma in some communities to those who do not undergo this practice, despite international recognition of FGM as a human rights violation as enshrined in Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The medical complications resulting from the various forms of FGM often prevent girls and young women from attending school, thereby limiting their education options and future economic potential. As protection of children is the duty of parents enforced by states, FGM is a violation of Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

While negatively affecting education choices, FGM also endangers girls and young women's health, with the possibility of infection, haemorrhage, and increased difficulties during childbirth. FGM reflects and perpetuates deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women and girls as recognised in Article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The practice violates their rights to health, security and physical integrity, their right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and their right to life when the procedure results in death.

President of GWJ, Catherine Bell states: "FGM is condemned by GWJ as a harmful traditional practice that destroys girls' and women's lives. National legislators must work in conjunction with local community leaders and local women to educate and to reinforce the human right of girls and women to take decisions over their own bodies, and emphasise instead the value of unhindered access to education and improved economic potential".

Graduate Women International (GWJ) is a membership-based international NGO based in Geneva, Switzerland, with presence in over 80 countries. Founded in 1919, GWJ 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. GWJ is in special consultative status with ECOSOC and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

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For more information please contact: Amy Paunila,  
T: +41 22 731 23 80; Email: [ap@graduatewomen.org](mailto:ap@graduatewomen.org)