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NIGERIA: Female student in Nigeria beaten to death over 'blasphemy'

Witnesses say police failed to disperse mob of fellow students in Sokoto who set victim on fire following WhatsApp comments

The Guardian (12.05.2022) - <https://bit.ly/39P3fI6> - A female student in [Nigeria](#) was beaten to death and set on fire by fellow students who accused her of posting "blasphemous" statements in a WhatsApp group, two witnesses have said.

The school, located in [Nigeria's](#) northwestern state of Sokoto, was immediately closed down following the attack.

Two suspects were arrested in connection with the murder of the student, who was identified as Deborah Samuel, said a spokesperson for the Sokoto state command.

"There is a WhatsApp group being used by the students, and her Muslim colleague student posted an Islamic piece. She criticised the posting," said one of the witnesses, who declined to be named.

"She composed an audio that contains blasphemous comments on the prophet of Islam and posted in the group. That is what triggered everything."

School security and police attempted to rescue the girl but were overwhelmed by the students, the witnesses said.

"Police have fired teargas on the students ... then began firing shots in the sky to disperse the students, but they resisted," said Summayya Usman Inname, a student in her second year.

"The police sacrificed the lady after the students began throwing sticks and stones at them, then the students used stones and sticks to beat the lady. After being beaten, she was set on fire."

The Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto said in a statement that it had closed the college indefinitely "following today's early morning student rampage".

The Sokoto sultanate council condemned the "unfortunate happenings ... that led to the loss of life of a female student at the institution".

Nigeria is divided into a largely Christian south and mostly Muslim north. Incidents such as this are very rare.

In 2007, Muslim pupils at a secondary school in the northeast beat a teacher to death after accusing her of desecrating the Qur'an.

SIERRA LEONE: 130 women rights groups call on the government to criminalize FGM

Equality Now (01.02.2022 – <https://bit.ly/3uprQLZ> - Following yet another tragic death in Sierra Leone due to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), women's rights organizations across the country and around the world have come together to co-sign an open letter calling on the Government of Sierra Leone to criminalize FGM and protect women and girls from this harmful practice.

On 20 December 2021, 21-year-old [Maseray Sei](#) died from acute bleeding and shock a day after being subjected to FGM, and this was confirmed by the post-mortem carried out on 14 January. A few days following Maseray's death, in a different region, a 15-year-old girl was admitted to hospital for urgent treatment after suffering serious complications due to FGM.

Sadly, these are not isolated incidents in Sierra Leone. Many women and girls in recent years have died or experienced devastating harm as a result of FGM, and during the latest holiday period, there were widespread reports of hundreds of young women and girls being cut.

Sierra Leone has one the highest FGM prevalence rates in Africa, with 83% of women and girls aged between 15 and 49 years having undergone the procedure according to the [2019 Demographic Health Survey](#).

Internationally recognized as a gross human rights violation, FGM involves the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It is a form of violence against women and girls, a manifestation of gender inequality and discrimination, and recognized by the United Nations as a form of torture.

Short term complications arising from FGM include: hemorrhaging; infections; severe pain; urine retention and other urinary tract problems; and psychological trauma. As with Maseray Sei and other victims, FGM can also result in death.

Longer term effects include: chronic infections, cysts, and ulcers; painful scar tissue; problems affecting the bladder, uterus, and kidneys; sexual health issues; mental health issues; infertility; menstrual complications; difficulties during childbirth, and an increased risk of infant and maternal mortality.

Sierra Leone's government is failing in its duty to protect women and girls from FGM

Despite the harm caused by FGM, the Government of Sierra Leone has failed to criminalize this harmful practice. The country's penal code does not specifically prohibit FGM, and there have been no known prosecutions relating to FGM. Furthermore, gender discrimination in Sierra Leone means that existing laws that are meant to uphold the rights of women and girls are not being effectively implemented to protect against FGM or punish perpetrators.

The failure to criminalize FGM has been further aggravated by a widespread lack of political will to end this harmful practice and the failure by the State to explicitly condemn FGM.

Following the death from FGM of 19-year-old [Fatmata Turay](#) in 2016, 10-year-old [Marie Kamara](#), and Maseray's recent death, organizations in Sierra Leone campaigning against FGM wrote each time to the President and Attorney General in office but never received a reply. This silence is deafening.

Of particular concern is how various politicians seeking election have made political pronouncements in support of FGM, with some even offering to pay for women and girls to be cut.

Sierra Leone must urgently enact and enforce a comprehensive anti-FGM law

The signatories of this open letter call on the Government of Sierra Leone, H.E. President Julius Maada Bio, and Attorney General Mohamed Lamin Tarawalley Esq. to urgently enact a law that explicitly bans FGM for all ages, puts in place adequate measures to protect against and eliminate FGM and gives survivors and the families of victims a means to access justice.

We strongly condemn the actions of politicians who are supporting FGM. We commend the politicians and other duty bearers who have spoken out and taken action against this harmful practice, and we call on others to join them.

We ask the State to prosecute all offenders putting the lives of women and girls at risk. This includes a comprehensive and swift police investigation and prosecution of all those responsible for the death of Maseray Sei. It is vital that justice is served in this case, and is seen to be served so that it can deter others from committing FGM.

Why Sierra Leone needs a law explicitly criminalizing FGM?

A law explicitly banning FGM in Sierra Leone would make it clear to its citizens that FGM is a human rights violation and a form of gender-based violence. It would define the government's obligations in providing protection to women and girls, demonstrate political will and intent, and communicate that the State is ready to take action.

A law against FGM would empower women and girls to recognize and assert their human rights and to seek and receive protection when vulnerable. For those whose rights have been violated, a law would provide legal recourse within the criminal justice system, and create tools to hold perpetrators to account. It would also act as an important deterrent to would-be offenders.

Having a legal framework which states FGM is unacceptable and unlawful is a vital component of promoting the social and behavioral change needed to encourage people at the community level to abandon the practice.

Having a legal framework will also mean Sierra Leone will be in compliance with the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa which Sierra Leone acceded to on 30th October 2015.

Alongside full implementation of the law, a Multi-Sectoral Approach (MSA) should be applied which brings together state and non-state actors working in collaboration.

Authorities need to deliver adequate funding to grassroots organizations and other stakeholders, and legislation should be accompanied by community engagement, awareness raising about the dangers of FGM, and empowerment of women and girls.

As part of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, all countries – including Sierra Leone – are duty-bound to measure the extent to which FGM occurs amongst their population. It is vital that information is gathered and made publically available. Such data is invaluable in efforts to end FGM because it makes clear the need for action, and provides a baseline from which the scale up and effectiveness of interventions can be measured.

Importantly, by criminalizing FGM, Sierra Leone’s government would be meeting the commitments it has made to the African Union’s Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) and to the Convention on the Elimination Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

We, the undersigned, call on the Government of Sierra Leone to honor its national, regional, and international human rights obligations and finally fulfill its duty of care in protecting girls and women from FGM.

See the list of signatories [here](#)

SOMALIA: Daughters of Somalia campaign to end female genital mutilation

UN (04.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3HyfvbZ> -In Somalia, over 90 per cent or more of girls and women, have been subjected to female genital mutilation, or FGM. Despite the practice having devastating health ramifications for women and girls - including pain, bleeding, permanent disability and even death - discussion over how to end the harmful tradition, remains taboo.

The United Nations has called for collaboration at all levels, and across all sectors of society across the world, to protect millions at risk from FGM every year.

As the **[International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation is marked on 6 February](#)**, the UN sexual and reproductive health agency, [UNFPA](#), continues to lead the UN effort to end FGM.

Dear Daughters

Last fall, and in collaboration with the Ifrah Foundation, the UN agency launched the [Dear Daughter campaign](#), as part of the effort to end FGM once and for all. The idea is to get individual parents not to cut their daughters. Through letter-writing, they pledge instead, to protect them, and support their right to govern their own bodies.

‘Dear Daughter’ works towards ending FGM in Somalia, which has one of the highest prevalence rates of the practice in the world. To date, [100 Somali mothers have signed the pledge](#).

By targeting rural and urban individuals and communities, that are making an extraordinary commitment, to change the FGM narrative. For Nkiru I. Igbokwe, gender-based violence specialist at UNFPA in Somalia, it is “accelerating the voices of women and men alike, to end FGM in the country”.

As part of the campaign, women living in an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp on the outskirts of the capital Mogadishu - home to 280 households that fled Danunay village nearly 250 kilometres away, due to insurgent violence - have been learning about the harmful effects of FGM.

Halima*, 50, a mother of five daughters and five sons, was among them. As a camp gatekeeper and a community member with influence, she was identified as someone who could advocate to help end the harmful practice that she and her first daughter had also endured.

Flashbacks

Like so many other women in her community, Halima underwent FGM as a child, subjecting her to lifelong health problems.

"The procedure was painful, with no anesthesia. I bled for days," she recalled. "I was in bed for more than three months and urinating was a problem".

When Halima reached adolescence, passing menstrual blood was also difficult, and as a newlywed, sex with her husband was a painful experience. When she became an expectant mother, childbirth was excruciating with labour lasting for days, putting her life at risk.

Despite her suffering, Halima allowed her first daughter to be cut, just like her mother had done.

'She felt the pain'

"My daughter underwent the Sunna [type](#) of FGM (removal of part or all of the clitoris), and she felt the pain I have been through," Halima said. But because it was not the more severe 'pharaonic' procedure (stitching the opening closed), people insulted them, she said, saying her daughter was unclean.

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** is [opposed to all types of FGM](#) and is opposed to health care providers performing FGM.

"Throughout the training course, I had flashback memories of how the practice has badly impacted my life," she said.

Three years ago, a young girl in the same camp died as a result of FGM, and Halima started galvanizing the community, to try and make sure the tragedy is never repeated.

Changing the future for Somali girls

The Ifrah Foundation, together with the Global Media Campaign to End FGM, distributed UNFPA-supplied radio transmitters to 100 households so residents could listen to awareness campaigns and information.

"It has been a long-standing dream of mine to work to save girls from the unnecessary pain and suffering I endured as a result of FGM," said survivor Ifrah Ahmed, founder of the foundation that bears her name. "Halima is an example of how we can change the future for all Somali girls", she added.

Halima's advocacy has expanded beyond FGM. She encourages pregnant and lactating mothers to visit health centres and raises awareness over sexual and gender-based violence.

She also notes that community members used to stay silent about rape due to fear of stigmatization, but now they seek help.

According to UNFPA, because of her leadership, almost 100 mothers have pledged not to practice female genital mutilation, sparing about 200 girls in the settlement.

"I don't want my other daughters and other young girls to go through the pain we have gone through," Halima said.

The numbers across the world

According to WHO, more than 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM in 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, where FGM is practiced.

Only in Somalia, based on the [2020 Somali Health and Demographic Survey](#), 99 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 in Somalia, have been subjected to FGM, the majority between ages five and nine. The survey also reports that 72 per cent of women believe it is an Islamic requirement, though some religious leaders have said Islam actually [condemns](#) it. In 2020, UNFPA [provided](#) 52,225 Somali women and girls protection, prevention or care services related to female genital mutilation. While there is no national legislation outlawing the practice, Puntland state [passed](#) a FGM Zero Tolerance Bill last year.

This year, WHO will [launch a training manual](#) on person-centered communication, a counselling approach that encourages health care providers to challenge their FGM-related attitudes, and build their communication skills to effectively provide FGM prevention counselling.

COVID-19 challenges

The [COVID-19](#) pandemic has increased the risk of female genital mutilation continuing unfettered, with the UN predicting that an additional two million girls will be victimized in the next ten years.

Prolonged school closures have provided cover for girls recovering from FGM. In addition, movement restrictions have prevented campaigners against FGM from accessing some villages.

SUDAN: Woman faces death by stoning for adultery in the first Sudan stoning case in a decade

Campaigners say sentence amounts to torture amid fears that country's new regime is rolling back women's rights.

By **Zeinab Mohammed Salih**

The Guardian (13.07.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3APILLW> - A woman in Sudan has been sentenced to death by stoning for adultery, the first known case in the country for almost a decade.

Maryam Alsayed Tiywab, 20, was arrested by police in Sudan's White Nile state last month.

Tiyrab says she is appealing against the decision. The majority of stoning sentences, which are predominantly against women, are overturned in the high court.

Campaigners worry the sentence is a sign that the [military coup in October](#) has emboldened lawmakers to roll back small gains for women's rights made under the country's transitional government.

The African Center for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS), based in Uganda, said the sentence violated domestic and international law and called for Tiyrab's "immediate and unconditional release".

The centre said the woman was not given a fair trial and was not told that the information she gave during interrogation would be used against her. Tiyrab was also denied legal representation, it said.

"The application of the death penalty by stoning for the crime of adultery is a grave violation of international law, including the right to life and the prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment," the centre said.

In 2020, Sudan's transitional government, which followed the ousting of Omar al-Bashir, announced [reforms to some of its hardline criminal laws](#) and Sharia policies. The reforms did not include stoning, but in August the country ratified the UN convention against torture. The ACJPS said stoning was a form of state-sanctioned torture and was in breach of the country's human rights obligations.

Jehanne Henry, a human rights lawyer, said the sentence "shows that harsh sharia laws [and] penalties are still being implemented in Sudan".

"The death by stoning case is a reminder that the criminal law reforms during the transition [government] were not complete, and that such harsh, archaic punishments are still officially on the books."

Flogging, which was outlawed in 2020, is still handed out as a punishment by the courts. The last known case of a woman sentenced to stoning for adultery was in South Kordofan state in 2013. The sentence was overturned.
