



**The Gambia
Committee On
Traditional Practices
Affecting The
Health Of Women
and Children
(GAMCOTRAP)**

**CELEBRATION OF THE
GAINS MADE IN
UPHOLDING THE ANTI
FGM LAW**



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Introduction

In line with its mission to promote and protect the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of women and girls, GAMCOTRAP, with support from the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) and Donor Direct Frontline Women, organized a national celebration to honor the progress made in upholding The Gambia's Anti-FGM law at all levels. The Anti-FGM law represents a powerful shield against practices that have long undermined the rights, health, and dignity of women and girls such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and other forms of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV).

The event brought together a cross-section of key stakeholders, including The Government (which was represented by the Minister Of Gender Hon. Fatou Kinteh) UN Body, National Assembly Member, Governor and Deputy Governor of LRR, District Chiefs, Community Leaders, Women and Youth groups, Ex-circumcisers, Religious Leaders, Artists, Media, and grassroots advocates who have played central roles in the national movement to end harmful traditional practices. Their unified presence signaled a reaffirmation of community ownership, resilience, and commitment to advancing gender justice in The Gambia.

Held in Jarra Soma, the event was graced by several Regional Alkalolu and Chiefs, the Governor of Lower River Region (LRR) and Deputy, the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, UNICEF representatives, Women groups, Regional coordinators, Community-Based Facilitators, and Youth groups from all regions. Opening prayers were delivered by the Alkalo of Jarra Soma, followed by the Chief of Jarra West who is also the Chairperson of GAMCOTRAP.

The celebration marked a significant milestone not just for The Gambia but as part of broader feminist and human rights goals, aligning with AWDF's strategic priorities on bodily autonomy and the Gambia National Development Plan's focus on social protection and inclusive development. It also resonated with the objectives of the CSW69 (2025), which commemorated 30 years of implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. By spotlighting community-driven advocacy and legal protection, the event mark The Gambia's contribution to global efforts to end FGM and promote the SRHR of women and girls.

Objectives of the Celebration

- To celebrate and recognize national progress in upholding the Anti-FGM Law.
- To engage and empower grassroots stakeholders, including youth, women, and traditional leaders.
- To highlight community commitment and advocate for continued enforcement of protective laws.
- To raise awareness on the socio-cultural and legal implications of FGM and child marriage.

Participants

The celebration was graced by over 300 participants drawn from diverse sectors and regions. These included:

- The Honorable Minister of Gender, Children and Social Welfare
- Regional Coordinators, Community-Based Facilitators and Beneficiaries from all regions
- Local authorities including Alkalos, Chiefs, and the Governor of LRR
- National Assembly Members (NAMs) from Lower Fulladu, Jarra West, and Old Yundum

- Representatives from International Partners
- Youth groups, Ex-circumcisers, Women Leaders, Civil Society Actors, Local Artists, the Media and Community Elders



Summary of Activities

Arrival and Opening Ceremony

Delegates from all regions of The Gambia arrived early and were warmly received by GAMCOTRAP staff, who facilitated registration and ushered them into the venue with vibrant cultural drumming, chanting, and celebratory songs symbolizing unity and resilience. The arrival of the Honorable Minister of Gender, Children and Social Welfare was met with high energy, traditional fanfare, and deep appreciation from the community, who honored her presence as a sign of national commitment to protecting women and girls.

The opening ceremony began with interfaith prayers led by both an Imam and a Christian priest, reflecting The Gambia's spirit of religious tolerance and solidarity in advancing human rights.

In his welcome address, Chief Yaya Jarjusey of Jarra West who is also Chairperson of GAMCOTRAP's Board, he emphatically stressed that repealing the Anti-FGM Law would be a grave national setback, undoing decades of advocacy and progress. He reminded attendees that no religious text or authentic Islamic Hadith validates FGM, making its defense under religious grounds baseless.

Governor Seedy Lamin Bah of the Lower River Region commended GAMCOTRAP for over four decades of dedicated activism and praised the organization's consistent efforts in defending the dignity and bodily autonomy of women and girls. He urged continued national support to sustain and build on the gains made under the Anti-FGM Law.

Key Speeches and Statements

Statement by National Assembly Member for Lower Fulladu and Jarra West Constituencies



Hon. Giba Mballow, Hon. Abdoulie Ceesay, and Hon. Alieu Baldeh delivered powerful remarks commending grassroots advocates, women leaders, and youth for their bravery in standing against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). They acknowledged the critical role communities play in safeguarding human rights in consolidating the efforts of the Government and emphasized that the voices of survivors, ex-circumcisers, and local leaders must continue to shape national policies.



They reaffirmed their unwavering legislative commitment to upholding the Anti-FGM Law and all related frameworks that protect the rights, health, and dignity of women and children in The Gambia. They reprimanded that this law is connected to several other laws that promotes and protect women and girls and that The Gambia is a signatory to

international treaties therefore repealing the law would erode decades of progress and expose these vulnerable population to SGBVs. Their speeches concluded with a pledged to be allies in ensuring that The Gambia remains a safe and just society for all.

Statement by UNICEF Representative

The UNICEF Representative delivered a compelling statement that emphasized the urgency of safeguarding the rights of children and empowering the youth as a cornerstone for national development. She highlighted that with women comprising 52% of The Gambia's population, it is crucial to mobilize collective efforts to protect them and the children they nurture from all forms of violence and harmful practices, particularly Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Aligning with UNICEF's mandate in The Gambia which is to promote child survival, development, protection, and participation, she reaffirmed UNICEF's commitment under the UN Joint Programme to support civil society organizations like GAMCOTRAP. She called for the implementation and enforcement of strong legal and policy frameworks that prevent violations against children's rights and champion gender equality. Furthermore, she stressed the importance of sustained community engagement to raise awareness on child rights, bodily autonomy, and gender justice.



By reinforcing the principles of peace, progress, and prosperity, the values enshrined in The Gambia's national motto. She advocated for inclusive development and stronger protection mechanisms that ensure a brighter, safer future for every child in The Gambia.

Statement by Minister of Gender, Children and Social Welfare

The Minister of Gender delivered an inspiring address on behalf of the President and in line with her ministry's mandate, highlighting her genuine enthusiasm for collaborating with both national and international partners. She celebrated the remarkable progress made through coordinated efforts against FGM while reaffirming the government's unwavering commitment to protecting and empowering women and girls. Emphasizing that her assignment by the President give emphasis to the nation's priority for women's rights, she outlined a comprehensive work plan designed to enhance coordination across agencies and reinforce community-based strategies to combat FGM.



Reflecting on a recent delegation trip to Egypt by National Assembly Members, which focused on researching legal frameworks and scrutinizing proposals to repeal the Women's Amendment Act of 2015, she stressed the critical need to clarify the legal and religious dimensions of FGM. She asserted that well-anchored organizations working on FGM-related issues are essential for safeguarding and uplifting vulnerable populations. Reiterating the government's zero-tolerance policy towards FGM, she called on all stakeholders to unite in creating

a future where every girl and woman enjoys safety, respect, and the freedom to thrive. Through her leadership, the Minister reinforced that protecting women's rights is a shared national responsibility crucial to the country's overall progress and development.

Statement by Deputy Governor of Lower River Region

Representing the Governor of the Lower River Region, the Deputy Governor delivered a heartfelt message that celebrated the progress made in advancing the rights of women and children in The Gambia. He recognized the historic and ongoing leadership of GAMCOTRAP in advocating for legal and social reforms to eliminate harmful traditional practices, particularly Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). He affirmed that the vibrant celebration was not just a ceremony, but a reflection of decades of relentless advocacy and grassroots mobilization that led to transformative change.

The Deputy Governor acknowledged GAMCOTRAP's critical role in shaping national discourse and policy contributing significantly to the establishment of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, and inspiring the institutionalization of child and women protection mechanisms within government structures. He emphasized that these gains are closely aligned and champion social justice at the local level.

Reaffirming the region's full commitment to upholding the Women's Amendment Act 2015, he called on all stakeholders to resist any attempts to reverse the progress made. He concluded by urging communities, civil society, and government to remain united in their mission to protect and empower women and girls thereby honoring the legacy of those who fought for justice and ensuring a brighter, safer future for the next generation.



Statement by Executive Director GAMCOTRAP

The Executive Director of GAMCOTRAP, Dr. Isatou Touray, expressed heartfelt gratitude on behalf of the Board, staff, and volunteers to all stakeholders for honoring the call to celebrate the gains made in upholding the Anti-FGM Law. She emphasized that the celebration represents a critical victory for the rights of women and girls and underscores the leadership role of communities in driving change.



She reaffirmed that GAMCOTRAP, since its founding, has championed advocacy and social mobilization for the introduction and enforcement of the Anti-FGM Law. Though the law was enacted in 2015, it remained largely unenforced until 2023, when GAMCOTRAP initiated the first successful prosecution in Bakadagi village in the Central River Region.

Dr. Touray acknowledged the bold leadership of His Excellency President Adama Barrow for standing firm in defense of the law, and praised the Minister of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare for her longstanding commitment to girls' reproductive rights. She also paid tribute to National Assembly Members who

stood on the right side of history—thirty-four out of fifty-three voted to uphold the ban, demonstrating their unwavering commitment to protecting the rights of women and girls. She cautioned that recent attempts to repeal the law must not derail progress, and called for continued vigilance and collaboration. She extended appreciation to key partners including Wallace Global Fund, AWDF, UNICEF, UNFPA, EU, Donor Direct Action, and CFLI for supporting advocacy efforts.

Finally, she commended the Gambia Police Force for enforcing the law and expressed hope for strengthened collaboration to ensure protection at all levels of society.

Cultural and Artistic Performances Musical Interlude Cultural and Artistic Performances

The celebration featured vibrant cultural and artistic displays that reinforced the day's core message. Local artists captivated the audience with musical interludes centered on women's empowerment and the protection of girls' rights, using traditional rhythms to connect with community sentiments. A major highlight was the official launch of a powerful anti-FGM poem written and performed by Gambian youth, evoking emotional responses and rallying the audience around the cause of safeguarding the girl child.



Former circumcisers also took the stage, delivering heartfelt testimonies of personal transformation. Through traditional chants and songs, they shared their journeys from practicing FGM to becoming vocal advocates against it. Their performances symbolized not only cultural continuity but a collective shift toward positive change and healing within their communities.



Closing Ceremony

The event concluded with a heartfelt vote of thanks delivered by Madam Fatou Njie, Regional Coordinator of GAMCOTRAP and wife of the Chief of Jarra West. In her dual role as a community leader and activist, she expressed deep gratitude to all participants, partners, government officials, and international allies for their unwavering support in advancing the rights of women and girls. She emphasized the significance of community unity and ongoing collaboration in sustaining the gains made against FGM and other harmful practices.

The celebration ended with a vibrant photo session, capturing powerful moments of solidarity among delegates, community members, and stakeholders. These images stand as lasting symbols of shared commitment and national resolve to protect and empower girls across The Gambia. The atmosphere was filled with pride, joy, and renewed determination to uphold the Anti-FGM Law and foster a safe, inclusive future for all.



Key Highlights and Achievements

- Overwhelming support from grassroots leaders, with public pledges to protect girls from FGM and early marriage.
- Renewed solidarity from parliamentarians to uphold and enforce the 2015 Women's Amendment Act.
- Increased awareness on FGM's legal, health, and religious implications among rural communities.
- Empowerment of youth and ex-circumcisers as change agents for sustainable advocacy.
- Amplification of community voices through music, poetry, and testimonies.

Reflections or Feedback

A participant from Jarra Soma said:

"This celebration shows that our voices matter. We've fought for this law, and we will protect it."

An ex-circumciser shared:

"Before, I thought I was helping girls. Now I know I was hurting them. I will never do it again."

Youth from LRR stated their readiness to:

"We feel empowered and feels their future is preserved through these initiations."

Conclusion

This celebration marked not just a moment of victory, but a powerful declaration that Gambians young and old, men and women stand firm against FGM. It reinforced the importance of grassroots engagement and the collective responsibility to uphold and implement protective laws.

GAMCOTRAP extends deep appreciation to AWDF for their flexibility and continued support, and to all stakeholders who stood for justice, especially the National Assembly Members who voted to uphold the ban. As we move forward, this celebration will remain a milestone of inspiration, fueling future efforts in advocacy, education, and legal reform.

9. Annexes

A. Photo Gallery

B. Attendance List

(List by name, organization, or region)

C. Program Agenda

Agenda Person Responsible

Registration of Delegates GAMCOTRAP Staff

Ushering High Table GAMCOTRAP Staff

Opening Prayers Imam & Priest

Welcoming Remarks **Chief Yaya Jarjusey**

Governor's Address **Governor Seedy Lamin Bah**

NAMs' Statements Hon. **Mballow, Hon. Ceesay, Hon. Baldeh**

Solidarity Statements **UNICEF, UNFPA, AWDF, US/EU/UK Embassies, NHRC, TANGO**

Statement by Minister **Minister of Gender**

GAMCOTRAP Address **Executive Director**

Musical Interlude **Local Artists**

FGM Poem Launch **Youth Advocate**

Testimoniesv **Ex-Circumcisers**

Vote of Thanks **Fatou Njie**

Closing & Photos **GAMCOTRAP Staff**