

REPUBLIC OF KENYA



**MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE, YOUTH AND GENDER
AFFAIRS**

**SPEECH BY PROF. MARGARET KOBIA, CABINET
SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE, YOUTH AND
GENDER AFFAIRS DURING THE OPENING OF THE SECOND
NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FEMALE GENITAL
MUTILATION AT THE MAASAI MARA UNIVERSITY ON
MONDAY, 4TH FEBRUARY 2019**

Hon. Samuel Tunai, Governor Narok County,

Hon. Senator, Narok County,

**Hon. Safina Kwekwe, Principal Secretary, State Department of Gender
Affairs,**

Hon. Members of the National Assembly Present,

Hon. Speaker of the County Assembly,

Boards and Commission Chairperson's, CEOs, Board Directors

Hon. MCAs Present

Delegates,

Distinguished Guest,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION

I am honoured today to grace this occasion and be part of this great movement which is focused on ending Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in our generation.

Let me take this opportunity to thank each one of you for making time to attend this conference, particularly those who traveled from different counties of our Republic, and other sub-counties within Narok county. Thank you for joining us so we may speak with one voice against the worst form of Gender Based Violence. FGM is indeed one of the worst forms of human rights violations. Allow me to echo the words of the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, which capture the agenda and tempo of our meeting today: ***"With the dignity, health and well-being of millions of girls at stake, there is no time to waste. Together, we can and must End this harmful practice, FGM"***

THE FGM CHALLENGE

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Kenya, the practice of Female Genital Mutilation has persisted mainly as a cultural practice in the communities that practice it. Although there has been a decline in the practice, its stubborn persistence continues to hold us in awe. Kenya Demographic and Health Survey of 2014 indicates that there is still a high prevalence of FGM among certain communities. For instance, prevalence stood at 94% among the Somali, 86% for Samburu, 84% for Kisii, and 78% for Maasai. Many other communities practice FGM in secrecy. Overall, it is estimated that there are approximately 9.3 million girls and women who have undergone FGM in Kenya. This accounts for **over 6 percent of all the estimated 140 million women and girls who have undergone the cut globally.**

As a country and government why are we concerned about FGM?

As government we are sensitive to the holistic well-being of all citizens, including the marginalized. Indeed, my ministry carries the mandate of ensuring the empowerment of the marginalized who include the youth, women and those living with disabilities. FGM is an extreme form of discrimination against women and girls and reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes. The practice violates their fundamental human rights including:

- right to health
- right to security and physical integrity
- right to freedom from torture and cruelty
- right to freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment
- right to life (when the procedure results in death)

The practice impedes the achievement of the social pillar in Kenya's Vision 2030 goal for socio-economic development. Further, it impedes the sustainable development goals (SDGs), specifically target 5.3 which aims to eliminate all harmful practices including early childhood marriage and FGM. Without its elimination the country cannot realize the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Globally, FGM is recognized as **a violation of the rights of women and girls**. Many national, regional and international actors have developed frameworks and programs to advocate for, and support, its abandonment. **The inclusion of a target on eliminating FGM by 2030 in the new Sustainable Development Goals, SDG 5.3**, underscored the international community's commitment to end FGM/C.

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION EFFORTS

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a country, we have developed policies and a legal framework geared towards the protection of women and girls from FGM and other harmful practices. These include:

- i. **Constitution of Kenya** Article 53 (1) (d) which provides that *"Every child has the right to be protected from abuse, neglect, harmful cultural practices, all forms of violence, inhuman treatment and punishment, and hazardous or exploitative labor"*.
- ii. **Children's Act 2001** Section 14 on the protection of young people from harmful cultural practices which states, *"No person shall subject a child to female circumcision, child marriage or other cultural rights, customs or traditional practices that are likely to negatively affect the child's life, health, social welfare, dignity or physical or psychological development."*

- iii. **Prohibition of FGM Act, 2011, revised in 2012:** The principal legal framework for the eradication / abandonment of FGM in Kenya which established the Anti-FGM Board (AFGMB) vested with the core mandate of designing, supervising, and coordinating campaigns for FGM/C eradication in Kenya. The Anti FGM board has been carrying out its mandate in the country for the last few years
- iv. In enhancing the campaign against FGM the Anti-FGM Board launched eleven **(11) anti -FGM strategic documents** that will serve immediate and long-term desires of all stakeholders in the campaign against FGM. I am confident that these documents will help in acceleration towards abandonment of the practice in Kenya
- v. **National policy on Eradication of Female Genital Mutilation 2019:** the draft policy is currently being developed under the supervision of the State Department of Gender affairs.

A legislative frame work and programs have been on-going with partners from the civil society, international development partners and individual leaders. May I take this opportunity to commend the various state and non-state actors who have partnered with us in the campaign to eradicate FGM from our communities.

CALL TO ACTION

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The first conference held last year under the theme: ***"Ending FGM is a Political Decision - Building Bridges for Elimination of FGM in Kenya"*** sought to strengthen collaboration and partnership between State and Non-State actors in anti-FGM programming. Resolutions made during the 1st Conference have simultaneously expanded commitments and brought additional urgency to efforts on the ground on Ending FGM. This conference aims to deliberate and build upon the achievements made from the resolutions of the first conference.

Under the theme, ***"Ending FGM is my Responsibility"*** I note that the 2nd conference will feature discussions on the following sub-themes:

a. Policy

b. Partnerships

c. Prevention

d. Prosecution

I am informed that the plenary discussions shall be geared towards achievements, challenges, lessons learned and recommended interventions that will inform a multi-sectoral approach for better gains.

As you hold your deliberations, I urge you to appreciate that to promote the abandonment of FGM, coordinated and systematic strategies that address all the socio-ecological factors that influence human behaviour need to be addressed in a campaign of this nature. It is imperative that you involve all community members and influencers as you embrace the human rights approach. Effective strategies need to embrace societal dialogue and the empowerment of communities so they may act collectively to end the practice.

I also urge you to embrace the principle of innovation as espoused in the tenets of transformational leadership. New approaches are needed for programs to effectively respond to the changing landscape of FGM practice in the country. From your experiences and knowledge, I urge you to use your creativity while developing new strategies so that programs can effectively respond to emergent FGM practices that include medicalization of FGM, cutting at infancy, reduction in age of cutting, and cross-border FGM, among others. I urge you to step up the campaign to the next level and improve the effectiveness of our interventions.

CONCLUSION

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I conclude my remarks, I wish to urge all of us working in communities to partner and support each other. As leaders, elders, youth and stakeholders we need to complement each other's efforts to end the practice. I particularly wish to call upon partners from county governments to embrace the spirit espoused by our President

Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta with regard to public service of "**one government**" and work in partnership with existing structures in national government to bring an end to harmful cultural practices.

Let me express my gratitude to those of you who have taken ownership of anti-FGM campaign as civil society, community leaders, religious leaders, political leaders and community members. On my part I assure you of my utmost support and that of my Ministry.

Lastly, let me wish you fruitful deliberations as you consider new and innovative ways to escalate our campaign against FGM. An FGM free society is a goal that will promote gender equality and development in our country. The global target for FGM elimination under SGD 5 and 3 is year 2030. It is an achievable goal within our sights.

TOGETHER WE SHALL END FGM BY 2030

PAMOJA TUTAKOMESHA UKEKETAJI KUFIKIA MWAKA WA 2030

With these remarks, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my pleasure to declare the 2nd National Conference on Female Genital Mutilation officially open.

Thank You

God Bless You All