Joint Statement by United Nations agencies in the Arab States Region on the

International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

Cairo, 6 February 2015

On the occasion of the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations entity for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (UN Women), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the World Food Program (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) reiterate their position that FGM/C is a grave violation of the human rights of women and girls, and a harmful practice that can have profoundly detrimental impact on their health, including their psychological, sexual and reproductive health and can sometimes cause their death.

WHO defines FGM/C, commonly called “female genital cutting,” as “all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons”. Once characterized as “female circumcision,” the word “mutilation” was adopted both to distinguish it from male circumcision and to stress the severity and the impact of the act.

The Convention on the Elimination of forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the African Charter on Human and People’ Rights, as well as other international and regional human rights instruments all prohibit this harmful practice that cannot be justified by any cultural or religious reasons and consider it a major health concern. In 2012, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution A/RES/67/146, banning FGM/C and calling on states to intensify their efforts in combatting this harmful practice.

Women and girls who have been subjected to this devastating practice and those who are at risk must have access to medical and psychological support to help them address the psychological, sexual and reproductive consequences of what they have suffered.

We also call on civil society organizations, religious and community leaders and the media to help raise awareness among the most affected, including refugee communities on the harms and illegality of FGM/C.

“There is no developmental, religious, cultural or health reason to cut or mutilate any girl or woman,” said United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon. “Although some would argue that this is a ‘tradition,’ we must recall that slavery, so called honour killings and other inhumane practices have been defended with the same weak argument.”
While national health surveys report prevalence rates of FGM/C in Egypt, Somalia, Sudan and Djibouti among women aged 15-49 exceeding 80%, recent reviews by UNICEF have shown signs of progress on curbing the practice among girls aged 0-14. “Just because a harmful practice has long existed does not justify its continuation. All ‘traditions’ that demean, dehumanize and injure are human rights violations that must be actively opposed until they are ended,” said Ban-ki Moon.

We urge Arab policy makers to adopt all necessary measures to effectively put an end to this cruel practice that has harmed millions of women unnecessarily. Such measures include enacting and implementing comprehensive legislation to ban the practice and hold accountable medical practitioners who carry out FGM/C both in public and private clinics.