

FGM

Nearly 30 years ago in the UK, campaigners thought a corner had been turned when parliament outlawed FGM. However, in all the years since, there has not been a single prosecution, let alone a conviction. Yet more than 60,000 women and girls in the UK have been mutilated, some as children taken abroad for the brutally named "cutting" season, and others almost certainly in private homes in British towns and cities. 24,000 girls under the age of 15 remain at risk in the UK.

On the UN International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM, a 17 year old student, Fahma Mohamed, one of nine girls in a Somali family that came to the UK when she was seven, launched her campaign, with the support of several national newspapers and anti-FGM charities. Among other things, she is urging the Education Secretary to help end FGM in Britain by asking head teachers to train and inform teachers about the horrors of the practice before the summer holidays, when girls are at the greatest risk., Over 250,000 people have signed her petition <www.change.org>. The UK Secretary of State for Education has agreed to Fahma's request. He has also agreed to consider how FGM education could be delivered in an age-appropriate way in classrooms. The government has just introduced mandatory recording of FGM in hospitals, money for publicity, a telephone helpline, and global funding. It will redraft safeguarding guidelines to include FGM advice.

To quote Ban Ki-Moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations, and a supporter of Fahma's campaign: 'Although some would argue that FGM is a "tradition", we must recall that slavery, "honour" killings and other inhumane practices have been defended with the same weak argument. Just because a harmful practice has long existed does not justify its continuation. All "traditions" that demean, dehumanise and injure are human rights violations that must be opposed until they are ended.'

For more information see <http://www.theguardian.com/society/female-genital-mutilation>