

27th February 2024

PRESS STATEMENT

GRAVE CONCERN ABOUT ATTEMPTS TO REPEAL THE WOMEN'S (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2015

The National Human Rights Commission is gravely concerned about a public notice from the Office of the Clerk of the National Assembly, published in various newspapers on 6th February, regarding the Women's (Amendment) Bill 2024, a Private Members Bill, which seeks to repeal the Women's (Amendment) Act 2015 that prohibits the practice of FGM/C in The Gambia.

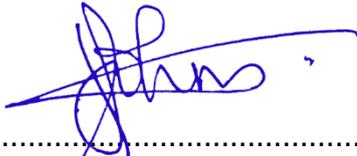
The Commission considers FGM/C as not just a health issue but also as a violation of the fundamental rights of women and girls, in particular the rights to life, health, bodily integrity, and protection from all forms of discrimination and violence. The World Health Organisation, UNICEF and national research conducted in-country have also revealed the profound health impact of FGM/C on our women and girls. Thus, this proposed Women's (Amendment) Bill 2024 is an attempt to roll back many years of advocacy, awareness raising and struggle by women's rights organisations and defenders which led to the eventual legal prohibition of FGM/C in the country.

While the Commission recognises that FGM/C is a complex and emotive issue and people have the right to practice their culture and religion, it is universally accepted that these rights are not absolute and cannot be invoked to violate human rights. As a party to several international and regional conventions and treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol, The Gambia is therefore obliged to safeguard the fundamental rights of women and girls from harmful traditional practices. The repeal of the Women's (Amendment) Act 2015 would be a serious derogation from the Gambia's obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of women and girls.

The Commission will continue to engage the relevant Government Ministries with remit to protect the rights and wellbeing of women and children on this matter. We have also written to all the Political Party Leaders with representatives in the National Assembly, and reiterated their duty to advance the rights of women and girls and solicited their support to ensure that their "National Assembly Members do not vote for the Women's (Amendment) Bill 2024."

The Commission wishes to again remind the Government of its obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of women and girls, to vigorously enforce the Women's (Amendment) Act 2015, to put in place educational and other measures towards the full abandonment of FGM/C in the country and implement the 2022 Concluding Observations of the 6th CEDAW Periodic Report.

The Commission shall continue to remain committed to the protection of the rights of women and girls.



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Jainaba Johm (Mrs)
VICE CHAIRPERSON

Cc All Media Houses
File.