

FGM persists despite legal gains

— Gender Ministry, UNFPA

By **Joselyn Kafui Nyadzi**

THE Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have expressed concern that female genital mutilation (FGM) continues to pose a serious threat to the rights and wellbeing of women and girls in the country, despite decades of legal reforms aimed at ending the practice.

In a joint statement to commemorate this year's International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, marked on February 6, the two institutions explained that although the criminalisation of FGM in the mid-1990s led to a significant reduction in cases, the practice had not been completely eliminated.

They pointed out that some families were now taking babies and young girls to neighbouring countries to undergo the procedure in order to evade the country's laws.

"This cross-border shift pushes the practice into secrecy, complicates detection and

exposes girls to even greater dangers," the statement said.

Practice, prevalent

The ministry and UNFPA said the practice remained most prevalent in parts of the Upper East, Upper West, Savanna and Bono Regions, especially in border communities where social ties and mobility extended beyond national boundaries.

They added that girls from households affected by poverty, migration, displacement and limited access to education faced heightened vulnerability.

The statement emphasised that FGM was neither a cultural rite nor a private family matter but a violation of the fundamental human rights of women and girls, with long-term and irreversible consequences on their health and lives.

Global perspective

Providing a broader perspective, the institutions disclosed that more than 230 million girls and women across the world were currently living with the effects of FGM.

They warned that without sustained political commitment and investment, about 23 million additional girls could be

subjected to the practice by 2030.

For Ghana, they said, the gains achieved over the past three decades remained fragile and could easily be reversed if action was not maintained.

Efforts needed

The statement further read that legal reforms alone could not eliminate FGM, adding that lasting change required continuous engagement with communities, traditional and religious leaders, civil society organisations, health workers, educators and law enforcement agencies.

It also called for predictable and flexible funding to support prevention, protection and response efforts.

The statement also read that as part of efforts to tackle emerging risks, the ministry, working with UNFPA and other partners, is strengthening community surveillance in high-risk areas, expanding safe spaces for girls and integrating FGM prevention into education and health services.

Cross-border collaboration and information-sharing are also being enhanced to prevent families from taking girls outside the country for the



practice.

Commitment

Reaffirming the government's resolve, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection pledged to enforce the law while intensifying engagement with affected communities.

In a supporting remark, the UNFPA Country Representative, Dr Wilfred Ochan, said Ghana

had made notable progress but cautioned against complacency.

"Continued coordinated efforts from all stakeholders, especially affected communities, are essential to sustain the progress," he said.

He urged the public, particularly families and traditional leaders, to play active roles in protecting girls and ensuring the total elimination of FGM.