



Statement of the *Religions for Peace* Executive Committee on Upholding Human Rights and Eliminating Harmful Practices, Including Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

25 November – 10 December 2024 | 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

As we conclude the [16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\)](#) with the celebration of [International Human Rights Day](#), the Executive Committee of *Religions for Peace* International stands united in condemning the alarming prevalence of violence against women and girls. We decry the horrific surge in sexual violence against women in conflict situations - a brutal manifestation of gender-based violence and a grave violation of human rights that transcends cultural, geographic, and socioeconomic boundaries. These appalling acts, often accompanied by a growing sense of femicide, reflect an alarming trend where women are abducted, brutalised, and murdered with impunity.

Harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence not only violate fundamental human rights and human dignity, but perpetuate cycles of trauma, inequality, and human rights violations across generations. These practices strip individuals of their inherent dignity, hinder their ability to thrive, and impose severe burdens on health systems, legal frameworks, and community resilience. Now, more than ever, as women and girls continue to face disproportionate challenges, we need to call for urgent, concerted action from all sectors of society.

To address some of these issues, *Religions for Peace* and UNICEF, through our longstanding partnership and collaboration and within the [Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities Initiative](#), is mobilising the assets and resources of faith communities to contribute to efforts in eliminating such harmful practices. We note with concern the disturbing trend of resistance to progress on gender equality and child rights, which severely protracts efforts to eliminate FGM and other harmful practices in different regions of the world. These setbacks, observed in different countries, directly impact the well-being and flourishing of women, youth, and children.

We recognise that religion and cultural traditions, at times, can be misused to perpetuate harmful practices through misinformation or misinterpretation. However, as faith leaders representing diverse religions, regions, gender and generation, we affirm that no sacred teaching justifies FGM or any harmful practices. Together, we stand resolutely in the truth that faith must always serve as a force for peace, dignity, equality, and healing.

Together, we commit to:

- **Strengthening our legacy of interfaith collaboration** in ending harmful practices by serving side by side and collaborating with other stakeholders in strengthening bonds of trust among our diverse communities to resist the pushback against gender equality and child rights.
- **Breaking the silence on harmful practices** that cause pain and suffering by mobilising our global movement to speak out persistently against harmful practices in every available space and using our platforms to amplify the voices of survivors and advocates.

- **Advocating for enhanced accountability mechanisms** to prevent sexual and gender-based violence, with a focus on ensuring that perpetrators are brought to justice, particularly in conflict situations where such heinous acts are often systemic and pervasive.
- **Building partnerships** with governmental, intergovernmental, and civil society organisations, representing the unity and commitment of the global *Religions for Peace* movement in eliminating GBV and other harmful practices.

As part of this commitment, we call upon:

- **Religious Institutions and Faith Communities** to raise awareness on harmful practices and equip faith communities, including women and youth, to identify, report, prevent, and heal from these atrocities. We urge:
 - The use of their platforms, including social media, to spread accurate information about eliminating harmful practices, ensuring access in local and Indigenous languages.
 - To highlight scriptural teachings and sacred texts to reinforce messaging and support campaigns towards the elimination of harmful practices.
- ***Religions for Peace* Inter-religious Councils** to collaborate with local partners and stakeholders, including women and youth, on advocacy efforts that contribute to raising awareness on GBV and other harmful practices, and to take a proactive role in advocating against these human rights violations.
- **All Religious and Faith Leaders** to join global awareness campaigns, including the collaboration with UNICEF on eliminating FGM and other initiatives, and engage in community-led initiatives to combat GBV and other harmful practices.

Religions for Peace affirms its commitment to acts of solidarity, compassion and care for survivors of GBV globally. We honour their resilience, while praying and advocating for those who continue to endure the harmful impacts of these practices.

Our mission to advance common action among the world's religious and faith communities for peace remains resolute. Together, as one global *Religions for Peace* movement, we will continue to build a world where every individual can live with dignity, free from violence and oppression – for a future where no one is left behind.