



Report on Series of Awareness Raising Forums on Human Rights, FGM/C & Underage Marriages Combat

Within the framework of spreading awareness and fighting habits harmful to women and children health, Al-Alag Center for Press Services implemented, with the support of Mrs. Taylor Ireland, a number of societal awareness-raising forums, dialogue sessions and activities in a number of local communities in selected areas in Khartoum, the Nile River and the Northern states.

Mrs. Taylor Ireland, a renowned fine artist and advocate of women and girls' rights, donated the yields of her gallery in Sydney, Australia, within the framework of her advocacy of women and girls' rights and efforts to prevent violence against women and girls.

Through Mrs. Taylor's donation, Al-Alag Center for Press Services supported grassroots feminist organizations operating in the field of human rights and combat of women and girls targeting violence particularly with regard to the female genital mutilation / cutting (FGM/C) and underage marriage of minor girls, which deprives them from education, besides, the Center also implemented a number of awareness-raising forums and sessions of societal dialogues in some neighborhoods in Khartoum, the Nile River and the Northern states wherein FGM/C and underage marriages of minor girls are rampant.

The forums, communal dialogues sessions and activities, which were well received by huge audiences, who lively interacted with and supported women's and girls' issues, wrapped up with a number of recommendations topped by an advice to intensify efforts to eliminate bad social norms underlying gender-based violence (GBV) including harmful practices of female genital mutilation / cutting (FGM/C) and marriages of child-girls.

Summary of Forums' Minutes: *Societal Awareness and Formation of A Feminist Body:*

Dar Al-Salam Media Club implemented, in collaboration with Al-Alag Center for Press Services, a forum at Dar Al-Salam Al-Amiriyah School in Dar Al-Salam Block 6, on 19 January 2023, on local community issues and solutions. It probed the practice of the female genital mutilation / cutting (FGM/C) with the participation of all society segments from Dar Al-Salam and surrounding villages, Al-Rasheed and Al-Jebel areas.

Both female instructors; Ustaza/ Hanan Musa and Ustaza/ Amira Hamid explained the misconception, adverse health consequences, and social and legal aspects of the female genital mutilation / cutting (FGM/C) and a brief introduction of Saleema Initiative to eliminate this heinous practice.

The second forum held in Dar Al-Salam Villages on 26 January 2023 targeted prominent civil leaders, influential dignitaries and activists besides female teachers, with the participation of concerned people from different society segments.



It dealt with the issue of underage marriages of minor girls, whereas Ustaza/ Amira Hamid and Ustaza/ Malaz Majid highlighted, in details, the concept, reasons and adversities of underage marriages of child-girls and the legal stance towards it. The audience proactive contributions, interaction and queries reflected the extent of the society understanding and push towards the positive change by means of useful experiences and success stories. The forum concluded with a number of recommendations to the forefront of which was raising the society awareness.

Moreover, Dar Al-Salam Media Club and Al-Alag Center for Press Services held at Dar Al-Salam Al-Amiriyah School a forum on the female genital mutilation / cutting (FGM/C) and its devastating health and social effects, with the participation of 24 and 23 male and female participants, respectively. The audience raised a number of questions and interventions around FGM/C. The forum recommended

- the activation of anti-FGM/C laws.
- raising the societal awareness to end the practice, altogether.
- encouraging young men and women to focus on awareness raising initiatives to educate the people of all walks of life, including schoolgirls on FGM/C's harmful complications.
- forming a feminist body in every community using the success stories and experiences.



The participants pledged to spread awareness in their respective communities in spur-of-the-moment easy ways at youth gatherings, clubs, women coffee sittings and through societal theater and otherwise means.

Meanwhile, Dar Al-Salam Club held a special forum on the premature marriage of child-girls which discussed the misconception, the legal and social aspects of underage marriage of minor girls and the problems and solutions. The dialogue probed the extent of the society understanding of the issue and its contribution to bring about positive change. The audience included 32 and 26 concerned female and male participants, respectively.

Following fruitful discussions and brainstorming, the forum recommended i) raising awareness on the adversities of child-girls marriages; ii) intensifying efforts to change the underlying social norms by lectures to parents through the youth initiatives, school and university syllabuses; iii) enacting and enforcing deterrent laws; iv) innovating new and swift means to shed light on the issue of underage marriage of child-girls; v) fighting poverty; vi) enacting emergency laws; and vi) launching advocacy campaigns to end the marriages of minor girls and the female genital mutilation / cutting (FGM/C).

Enacting Exceptional Laws and Launching Advocacy Campaigns to Curb Child-Girls' Marriage and FGM/C:

The forum in the Nile River State's, organized by Ronan Cultural Organization in cooperation with Al-Alag Center for Press Services on FGM/C and child-girls marriages issues and attended by 30 interested participants concluded with recommendations including:

- i) Calls to prop up the role of the media through the local radio stations.*
- ii) launching campaigns in villages and rural areas in coordination with pertinent entities to enlighten the public on the dire repercussions of FGM/C and marriage of minor girls.*
- iii) intensifying the role of civil society organizations (CSOs).*
- iv) drawing exceptional legal redlines to prevent the marriage of minor girls and FGM/C, altogether.*



v) *organizing campaigns to fight all forms of assaults against women and girl.*

vi) *enacting deterrent laws to punish any midwife who violates the rights of a child-girl by performing FGM/C on her and any marriage cleric who concludes a marriage of a minor girl.*

vii) *launching advocacy campaigns with the participation of the imams of mosques and marriage clerics to combat child-girls marriages and the female genital mutilation / cutting (FGM/C).*

and viii) *organizing forums and dialogue and brainstorming sessions through grassroots feminist organizations and resistance committees.*

Poor and Limited Education Behind Child-Girls Marriages:

In the same context, Aseel Organization's forum raised the awareness of 63 young women and men around the protection from gender-based violence (GBV).

Communal Dialogues around Protection from GBV, Child-Girls Marriages and FGM/C:

Three societal forums were held on the protection from gender-based violence (GBV), underage marriage of minor girls and the female genital mutilation / cutting (FGM/C) in Al-Burag School, in Hara 4 (Fourth Neighborhood) and Abu Al-Migdad School in Hara 5 (Fifth Neighborhood) in Mayo Area in the period from 26 to 29 January 2023, in addition to a session of dialogue titled: 'The Family and Society Roles in Combating Women Targeting Violence and Violations of Children Rights on 11 February 2023 at Mayo Children Cultural Library.

The participants were educated on the different types of gender-based violence (GBV), underage marriage of minor girls as a form of forced marriage of child-girls below 18 years of age and explained how it takes place along with associated physical assault, psychological pressure, threats and insults.

It unveiled the causes of premature marriage to include the limited and insufficient education leading to the deprivation of girls and boys from education, besides the majority of parents cannot afford fees and accompanying costs of education coupled with the limitation and scarcity of public education opportunities, which raise the rate of underage marriage of minor girls.

Moreover, the forum and dialogue sessions also referred to women targeting violence including gender-based violence (GBV) against women and slammed the failure to enact and / or enforce deterrent laws, the poor public awareness of the laws and the dangers of premature marriages, in addition to the social norms and traditions prevail over the laws and medical advices in some societies combined with repelling stigmas.

It pointed out that the underage marriage is rampant in the areas south of the greenbelt which requires interventions to raise awareness and combat the phenomena.

In the same context, the dialogues explained and defined the process of the female genital mutilation / cutting (FGM/C) and its devastating health ramifications, which necessitate abandoning it for good, besides stressing the benefits of leaving the girl-child Saleema i.e. uncut, sound and healthy and shed light on Article (141) of Sudan Penal Code, which criminalizes FGM/C and punishes against practicing it.

Regarding the role of the family and the society in curbing gender-based violence (GBV) and violations of the children rights, the forum and dialogue sessions highlighted the historical background of children protection and the hurtful practices they are subjected to from a legal perspective, and the manifestations and types of child targeting violence, child protection and the activation of the society responsibility.

Discussions around Psychological Support and Dedication of a Hotline to Curb Child Targeting Violence:

The participants discussed the duty of child protection and the difference between the metropolitan police and the child and family protection police, specialized in protecting children and women from violence, and cited the types of child targeting violence to include the sexual assaults, abuse and beating, and stressed the importance of providing psychological support and calling the dedicated hotline (9696) to report on any incident of child targeting violence, in addition to interventions to save delinquent, support lacking and homeless children.

The sessions dealt with child targeting sexual violence, harassment, abuse and exploitation of children through temptation or intimidation and underlined the importance of educating children and raising their awareness to avoid abuse and identify and run away from pedophiles.



The discussion touched on the punishments against sexual harassment and abuse of children imposed by the Child Act of 2010, which ranges from two months to 15 years in prison.

The forum and dialogues ascertained the necessity of reporting on the incidents of sexual harassment, abuse or molestation of a child, while preserving the evidences and making sure not to tamper with or destroy the evidences, traces and clues of the crime, such as sexual intercourse, and immediately report on such incident through the available mechanisms including the hotline (9696).

Then, the discussions covered the types and dangers of narcotics, brain stimulants and bullying at schools, plus the female genital mutilation / cutting (FGM/C) and Article 141 of Sudan Penal Code that criminalizes and punishes against the practice of FGM/C.



The Outcomes:

- Raising awareness of (63) interested young women and men around the protection from:- gender-based violence (GBV); child-girls marriage; and the female genital mutilation / cutting (FGM/C) to protect children from these types of violence and rights violations;
- Readiness to change the underlying social norms and mindset;
- Remarkable correction of mindset and positive change of misconceptions of fanatics clinging to the underage marriage of minor girls, who changed mind and renounce the habit.

The Recommendations:

The forums and dialogues sessions concluded with a number of recommendations to:

- 1 Present awareness lectures to law enforcers including the police, prosecutors and legal aides on the law articles that protect women and girls from harmful practices like FGM/C and underage marriage of child-girls;
- 2 Organize and implement forums for children to raise their awareness of their rights and how to avoid victimization and reporting on harassment, abuse and violation of their rights;
- 3 Continue to hold societal awareness raising dialogues pushing for abandonment of harmful practices, assaults prevention and providing protection to children;
- 4 Launching mass campaigns, emergency hotlines and awareness centers for would-be brides and grooms and paying attention to family cohesion and familial bonds;

The participants raised a number of questions around the prevalence and dire repercussions of FGM/C and marriage of child-girls phenomena and the role of the society in fighting them.

Controversy around the Sexual Culture of Adolescent Girls:

Lamatna Association in Buri Al-Lamab Neighborhood carried out, on 04/03/2023, a lecture to women, female students and schoolgirls on the reproductive health issues. Lamatna Association is a voluntary feminist association consisting of a group of women of different walks of life including housekeepers, civil servants, female students and schoolgirls. It operates in the social field in Buri Al-Lamab Neighborhood, in Eastern Khartoum covering the topic of reproductive health within its social action. The lecture attended by a number of ladies and young women was presented by Dr. Mai Mamoun Yousef, a female doctor and reproductive health consultant working for Dream Specialized Maternity Hospital.

Dr. Mai started the lecture with the definition of the concept of the productive health linked to a vital period in the woman's life, namely the verge of maturity and puberty before marriage and after menopause.

She underscored the importance of good nutrition and awareness during puberty and not to ignore the excruciating menstrual pains for they precipitate diseases, which require seeing medical checkup, and touched on the requisite of awareness of the cons and pros of the period of puberty, the needed types of food, clothing and appropriate sanitary pads during the puberty period .

She also urged for seeking medical consultation before marriage to checkup for chronic diseases and otherwise disorders, if any, for the earlier the treatment, the more successful the treatment, healing and wellbeing, especially with regard to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) to get ready for marriage and childbearing.

Moreover, she ascertained the importance of medical follow-up during pregnancy besides psychological supervision to withstand any associating psychological pressures, in addition to the early detection of the condition of the fetus, and maintaining good health until childbirth, whereas, the woman in this period needs the care of her husband and other family members.

Dr. Mai talked about family planning and the adequate intervals between births, and the detection of diseases like breast cancer and so forth, and also touched on women postmenopausal sufferings from osteoporosis and night flushes and sweating and their need to take complementary vitamins and hormones.

Dr. Mai listed the psychological and physical lifelong awful effects of the pharaonic circumcision (i.e. FGM/C) on women's lives.

Furthermore, elaborate discussions covered the subject matters from all sides, whilst the audience raised questions around the physical and psychological conditions of women during pregnancy, complications including miscarriages, sufferings caused by FGM/C, immaturity of would be mothers and the psychological and physical health consequences and menstruation accompanying pains and how to avoid it and seek medical follow up.

Doctor Mai pledged to provide health and psychological counseling, and receive cases at Dream Specialized Hospital, and promised to present more awareness lectures.