



PRESS RELEASE –APRIL 1, 2015

Launch of the MEN SPEAK OUT project

BRUSSELS, APRIL 1, 2015 GAMS Belgium, FORWARD UK, HIMILO foundation in Netherlands and the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp are pleased to announce the launch of MEN SPEAK OUT, a project that aims to engage men in the prevention of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Europe. MEN SPEAK OUT is co-funded by the European Commission Daphne Programme.

Today, FGM is seen as a "women's affair". Men hardly interfere on the issue and their views on the practice are often unclear. However, since FGM concerns all members of the community, men can, and should, play an important role in ending FGM. Men's involvement in combatting FGM is crucial and can accelerate the abandonment of the practice in Europe, and by extension in the countries of origin.

Within the scope of this project, a quantitative and qualitative research study will be conducted in Belgium, UK and the Netherlands to increase knowledge on the men's role in the perpetuation of the practice. Peer educators will be trained in the 3 countries and using a human right and gender approach specifically targeting men.

"Not only will MEN SPEAK OUT deliver the first comparative report of men perception on FGM in UK, Belgium and Netherlands, the partnership will also produce a training manual for male peer educator, an educational booklet to promote the dialogue on FGM between men and women, 9 different posters with men portraits and messages, 4 movie clips and a documentary as part of an awareness campaign. A total of 45 male peer educators will be trained and active after the end of the project. We expect 6000 men, women and youth to be reached out by the activities of the project." Fabienne Richard, coordinator of the MEN SPEAK OUT project

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About Female Genital Mutilation

The new report published by UNICEF on July 22, 2013 shows that more than 125 million girls and women alive today in 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East have undergone some form of (FGM). Thirty million more are at risk over the next ten years. The WHO and experts around the world agree that FGM can have serious consequences on women and girls' physical and mental health.

About the partners

GAMS Belgium, is the oldest and largest organisation in the field of FGM prevention in Belgium with country wide programmes including in Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia. GAMS Belgium has staff with range of competencies: midwifery, clinical psychologist, anthropologist, and community educators. GAMS Belgium is recognised by the government bodies (cabinets and administrations) and was involved in the introduction of FGM in the Violence Against Women National Action Plan. GAMS Belgium coordinates "Strategies concertées de lutte contre les MGF", a multidisciplinary network of professionals and members of the communities to improve coordination of actions and ensure efficiency and quality of work.

FORWARD (Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development) is committed to gender equality and safeguarding the rights of African girls and women. They are a leading African diaspora women's campaign and support organisation working through partnerships in the UK, Europe and Africa to transform lives, tackling human rights violations that affect the dignity and wellbeing of girls and women. FORWARD focus on female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage and obstetric fistula.

HIMILO Foundation in Netherlands was established in 2006 and is member of FSAN (Federation of Somali Association). The organisation supports the Somali community with community development programs and capacity building activities. HIMILO has also very good contacts with Sudan, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia communities. Several of their members have been trained by FSAN and Pharos as key figures in the fight against FGM.

The **Institute of Tropical Medicine** in Antwerp (ITM) is a renowned centre of excellence for research, training, and services in tropical medicine. The ITM has coordinated two FGM prevalence studies in Belgium in 2010 and 2014. Since 2001 a module on FGM prevention and care is part of the Master of Public Health programme and the Post-Graduate courses. The department of Public Health has a successful team of social scientists who have an excellent track record investigating in fields of medical research where human behaviour in poorly understood.