

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-7020

April 28, 2016

The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520-0099

The Honorable Gayle E. Smith  
Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004-3002

Dear Secretary Kerry and Administrator Smith:

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is recognized by the United Nations as a violation of the human rights of women and girls. At least 200 women and girls have been cut in the approximately 30 countries where data show FGM/C is the most concentrated. I first learned of FGM/C in 1994. The image I saw in a cable news show about the practice has remained with me, more than 20 years later: a 10 year-old girl in a little party dress, held down by two men to be mutilated.

It is because of this little girl, and the millions of others just like her, that I have worked to pass legislation outlawing FGM/C in the U.S. and banning so-called “vacation cutting,” where young girls from here in the U.S. are shipped abroad to be cut. But FGM/C persists throughout the world. At my request, in 2014, the Government Accountability Office began studying what the U.S. government is doing to put a stop to this practice. They have completed a report – which has been finalized and will soon be released – concluding that U.S. assistance efforts to address FGM/C are limited. I am deeply disappointed that the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development are not more fully engaged in putting an end to this horrific practice.

According to the GAO report, aptly entitled “Female Genital Mutilation: U.S. Assistance to Combat this Harmful Practice Abroad is Limited,” in 2014, USAID and State had just one active stand-alone project each focused on ending FGM/C, but both are soon coming to an end. The project funded by USAID in Kenya runs through the end of this fiscal year, and State’s program in Guinea ends this very month. The U.S. spent less than \$2 million on both of these programs combined. The U.S. has also never contributed to the largest international effort to accelerate FGM/C abandonment, the United National Children’s Fund and the United Nations Population Fund Joint Programme on FGM/C.

When reports show that prevalence rates of FGM/C are higher than 90 percent in some countries where this practice occurs, it is inexcusable that our nation is not stepping in as a stronger voice in ending this dangerous form of violence against women and girls. Therefore, I am urging you to take immediate action to make ending FGM/C a true priority and dedicate

robust and sustainable funding sources to this cause. The U.S. should be a leader in the fight to end FGM/C – not a bystander. I hope you will agree.

I look forward to hearing your response to the GAO report and to understanding what actions you intend to take to increase the role of the U.S. in addressing this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Harry Reid", written in a cursive style.

HARRY REID  
United States Senator