

We are the ones who can't be ignored

Walkers take to the US Capital to raise awareness about Female Genital Mutilation

Photostory by Diane Walsh

The first of its kind in the Washington DC area was this remarkable “Walk against Female Genital Mutilation” at the Washington Monument, hosted by the **Global Woman P.E.A.C.E Foundation**.

Full credit and accolade is due to GW-PF for the Walk’s bounding success. Its courageous aim was specifically designed to have Walkers circle the paths around the Washington Monument in the effort to raise the profile of the growing problem of FGM on Western soil.

The evidence of Female Genital Mutilation, as the imported but “unseen” underground practice occurring as a result of international migration, continues to mount.

Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation is a well-vetted woman’s rights and peace organization with registered US. charity status and is based in Fairfax, Virginia. With its strong organizational reputation and with its links to the worldwide movement against FGM, the Walk was successful in being able to attract a diverse group of par-



I met up with the tightly knit group of international anti-FGM activists who gathered together at the NW corner of the Point to raise needed awareness with a specific emphasis on the US situation. The event urged that immediate action be taken on

The Walk itself may have been missed by a seemingly sleepy *Washington Post*, seen omitting to provide coverage of the event despite its global importance – but that’s not to say they can’t make up for it!

Nevertheless the Walk was indeed picked up repeatedly by the international press and news spread on social media with exuberance. Here in this video, to be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=flJBdzv2ISU, is one

the speakers invited as a key note, Barbara Mhangami. She is a feminist poet and researcher who travelled from Michigan. She, among others, is an example of the shining talent and commitment of some of the “Activist Walkers” who sought to promote GW-PF’s aim to open a Crisis Centre right in DC. Guaranteed preventive action against FGM for girls living in the US in addition to service provision for post-FGM women, is, key. More pictures of speakers and attendees here.

Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation is committed to real action on the ground and has now raised leading awareness

in the US Capital. The Walk succeeded in pushing strongly against Female Genital Mutilation, focusing on exposing incidents of the practice on US soil and, importantly, recognizing working in collaboration and in solidarity with a global alliance of activists against FGM to build identification and response services (#IDRS on twitter) to address the problem.

FGM has spread to Western soil, this is undisputed in Europe. It has also leaked out recently that FGM has occurred in the US – this must not be allowed to go unnoticed and unrecorded. Information is that family groups have joined with other family groups to raise money to “import the cutter” to perform FGM in secret. No one can dispute that this is heinous and frankly ghastly that it happens in the West.

The Walk’s acute profile is being recognized worldwide and is galvanizing efforts to put this issue at the top of the US political agenda.

More information can be found on twitter, using hashtags #DC #FGM #GAFGM or follow me @dwalshmedia, hashtag #IDRS (Identification and Response Services) including #GAFGM #UN to learn more about global alliance anti-FGM solidarity links. Follow more updates on twitter @1GlobalWoman



ticipants from all over the US (and Canada) agreeing to participate as Sponsored Walkers. Walkers raised their own sponsorship and joined in the cause on the freezing cold but sunny Saturday morning of November 8, 2014, and as one of the proud, I can say it was an incredible experience and a worthy measure to create globalized action with American leadership.

US soil to ensure complete prevention of FGM; the commitment of it never being able to take place in the US.

Furthermore the Walk emphasized the need to secure the goal of a US commitment to complete eradication worldwide, in concert with the 2010 UN resolution against FGM and associated solidarity activists.



Global Women P.E.A.C.E. Foundation “Walk to End FGM” a great success

Fairfax, VA -- Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation (GWPF) was joined by its partners and supporters on Saturday, November 8, on the Washington National Mall to “Walk to End FGM”.

The day began with music, as the crowd gathered to get outfitted in warm clothing and t-shirts. Families and their children assembled in the chilly early morning sun but the atmosphere was positive.

Everyone was there to be a part of a memorable occasion; they were there to participate in the first annual walk to end female genital mutilation (FGM).

No other organization has ever held a walkathon against the practice of female genital mutilation in Washington, D.C.

As the temperature began to rise, 14 teams of walkers lined up after bananas, granola bars, peanuts and water had been distributed to the crowd by many volunteers. The teams of walkers made their way up Constitution Avenue toward the memorials of World War I

I, Vietnam Veterans, Lincoln, Korean War, Martin Luther King and the Washington Monument.

The crowd returned with enthusiasm to the National Mall to listen to a series of speakers tell them about female genital mutilation. Participants came from as far as Canada, Massachusetts, Florida, Arizona, Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, Richmond, Virginia, Hagerstown,

Maryland, etc.

CEO and president of IMA World Health, Rick Santos shared stories of violence against women and girls in various countries he had visited. Dr. Martha Allen, Director of the Women’s Institute for Freedom of the Press read a list of FGM survivors and activists around the world, while David Rawls, In-Country Director of Hope 2 Liberia recounted his trips to Liberia where his organization is building a school to help end FGM through education.

UniteWomen.org’s Board Member, Shannon Fisher told the crowd, “Female genital mutilation has been illegal in the United States since 1996, and transporting girls out of the US for FGM is now punishable by five years in jail. But the procedure is still performed in private, and it has gone largely underground.”

Vice president and co-founder of We Are Woman, Alaina LaTourette talked about the violation of the female body and FGM, while Summer Pearson, Global Woman’s Board member, read a special message from Dr. E. Faye Williams, president and CEO of the National Congress of Black Women, “It is said that the civilization of a nation is determined by the way it treats its women and its children.

“By that measure, most nations have a long way to go to be considered civilized. Certainly no nation that permits mutilation of the genitals of its young girls can be

called civilized.”

Barbara Mhangami-Ruwende, a public health practitioner, shared a special poem she had written and dedicated to all of the mutilated little girls, “Imagine a girl suddenly thrust onto a mat on a floor, in a hut in the forest, or on an operating table in a doctor’s office. Imagine the shock, confusion and horror as she watches her mother, aunt and grandmother turn and walk away.”

The crowd did not expect what came next, when the president of Change Agent Network, Annie Wright took the stage and told her personal story through tears about how her mother died in childbirth as the result of FGM, and she too was taken at seven years old to the “bush” and was mutilated.

Annie stood tall on the stage and divulged to the public for the first time, “I can stand here today and say that I am a survivor of FGM. I was told never to tell anyone, and I never told anyone until Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation invited me to their focus group meeting.”

Entertainment was provided by local groups, the Liturgical Dance Group and the Chosen Generation Dance Group. Media coverage was provided by PressThePresident, BRITE Radio, Loudon Woman Magazine, Diane Walsh and Alexandra Gerard.

The program continued with Angela Peabody, president of the host organization reading a speech sent from Liberia by

an FGM survivor, Eva Flomo. Flomo wrote, “America, do you want to be labelled as the nation that stood by and watched countless little girls get mutilated or die simply because it doesn’t affect you directly? You lead the free world; make it freer for little girls and women in Africa and other parts of the world actively practicing FGM.”

In conclusion, Peabody announced the three winning teams. The Women’s Institute for Freedom of the Press team took the first prize for raising the most money, the FGM No More team walked away with the 2nd prize, while the BRITE Peace Walkers team took 3rd prize.

The proceeds raised from “Walk to End FGM” will help establish a special support centre in the Washington, D.C. metro area, expected to open in 2015. The support centre is expected to include a hotline with trained phone counsellors, career assistance and capacity building for the girls and women affected by FGM.

To learn more about Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation and future events or to make a donation, visit www.globalwomanpeacefoundation.org. Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation is a registered 501c3 non-profit organization with the US Internal Revenue Service. As such, your donations are tax deductible to the maximum extent required by law.

— Lydia Sherwood, Presto Public Relations
<http://www.globalwomanpeacefoundation.org>