



### **Should candidates for suicide be encouraged?**

*By Dr. Morissanda Kouyaté, Executive Director of the Inter-African Committee*

It was with great sadness and concern that I read the interview with Bettina Shell-Duncan, anthropologist, entitled: "Why Some Women Choose to Get Circumcised".

Based on the modest experience of 30 years' activity of the Inter-African Committee in the fight for the elimination of female genital mutilation, I would like, once again, to emphasize that we must avoid falling into the trap set by those who seek fame and free publicity by opposing human achievements proven to be for the good of humanity, such as the fight to eradicate FGM in the world.

African women, and men (since men are the indirect target group of FGM), who are in majority the victims of this horrible practice, which is traditional not cultural, agree to engage fully in the campaign against this plague at all levels: community, national as well as regional through the African Union and African Heads of State. In order to show their willingness and commitment, and thanks to the advocacy of the Inter-African Committee and its partners, the African Heads of State not only adopted, in 2003, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, on the Rights of Women, in which article 5 is exclusively dedicated to FGM; they also requested and obtained from the United Nations General Assembly the vote of Resolution 67/146 on the elimination of female genital mutilation, rightly considered a serious violation of human rights. Twenty African countries already have specific laws against FGM.

Refusing any navel-gazing and considering the problem of FGM as a universal challenge, the Africans are convinced that only a global mobilization will put an end to this harmful and degrading practice. This is why the prevalence of FGM is decreasing worldwide even though progress is slow. The achievements and results registered were un hoped for in the beginning of the fight.

I have always said that the fight for the elimination of female genital mutilation will not be won in air-conditioned amphitheatres with slides describing an African society of cave-dwellers entangled in harmful practices. An Africa that pathetic anthropologists

strive to magnify in order to make people dream away from a world that is economically, politically and socially suffocating. The inexorable victory over FGM will be achieved through joint efforts throughout the world.

During the debate arising from the above-mentioned article, some compare female genital mutilation with male circumcision but they cannot be compared. If they were to be compared, the male circumciser should make the incision some 10cm higher up.

Since Africa and the rest of the world say no to female genital mutilation, I make an urgent appeal to all actors: international, regional and national organizations, civil society and other good wills to devote their intelligence, their time, their forces and their resources to the fight for the elimination of this degrading practice and to ignore any provocation for promotional purposes.

I am a medical doctor not an anthropologist; but the only lesson I have learnt from anthropology is that in order to better observe a social group or community you need to apply the strategy called "participatory observation", i.e. become immersed in the group, do exactly what it does and endure exactly what its members endure.

If the anthropologists interested in the phenomenon of female genital mutilation were to use the participatory observation approach, they would certainly not give the same idyllic description of what the victims of FGM are subjected to and we would have less controversy and debates.

Unfortunately, the victims of female genital mutilation are innocent girls and women who suffer the horrors of a harmful practice.

Instead of studying them from an anthropologic point of view, let us save them!