Ivory Coast - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 17 April 2009

Information on the situation with regard to FGM in the Ivory Coast

Section 5 of the United States Department of State 2008 Human Rights Report for Cote d'Ivoire, under the heading ‘Children’, states:

“FGM was a serious problem. The law specifically forbids FGM and provides penalties for practitioners of up to five years’ imprisonment and fines of approximately 360,000 to two million CFA (approximately $720 to $4,000). Double penalties apply to medical practitioners. An estimated 60 percent of women had been subjected to the procedure. FGM was practiced most frequently among rural populations in the north and west and to a lesser extent in the center and south. FGM usually was performed on girls before or at puberty as a rite of passage. Local NGOs, such as the Djigui Foundation, Animation Rurale de Korhogo, and the National Organization for Child, Woman, and Family, continued public awareness programs to prevent FGM and worked to persuade FGM practitioners to stop the practice. No arrests related to FGM were made during the year.

There were no developments in the 2006 case in which the FN arrested and later released without charge a mother and the FGM “cutters” who had mutilated, or partially removed, the genitalia of the woman's three-year-old daughter, who later required medical attention.” (United States Department of State (25 February 2009) - 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Cote d'Ivoire)

Section 4.2.2 of a January 2009 Landinfo report titled ‘Female genital mutilation of women in West Africa’, under the heading ‘Public authorities acting as ombudsmen’, states:

“In several West African countries we find state-supported human rights commissions and similar public authorities that are mandated to act as ombudsmen for the general public. Several such bodies offer help with arbitration and legal assistance to people who turn to them for help.

During a discussion with a representative from Landinfo, the staff at the National Human Rights Commission in Nigeria stated that legislation prohibiting FGM is symbolically important as an expression of progressive values. They also maintained that a legal ban may work as an extra deterrent when the commission mediates in cases where young women resist being subjected to FGM, even though it is common knowledge that the ban rarely or never leads to prosecution of people responsible for subjecting girls and young women to FGM.
Generally, such public bodies have scarce resources, even in countries that are relatively wealthy for the region (like Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire). Many people are unaware of the possibility that they can turn to these commissions for help, and even when people do know of the possibility, the general distrust of public authorities and reluctance to involve people to which one has no personal ties in private family matters results in them being involved in relatively few cases. There is also reason to believe that most people who would appeal to such a commission for help would be well educated people from higher social strata.” (Landinfo (12 January 2009) - Female genital mutilation of women in West Africa, p.27)

Paragraphs 14.01 and 14.02 of the UK Home Office Country of Origin Information Report on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), under the heading ‘Cote d’Ivoire (Excision): Extent practised’, states:

“14.01 ‘Female Genital Mutilation – A Guide to Laws and Policies Worldwide’ stated that the prevalence is 43 per cent and that FGM was found to be much more prevalent among the Muslim population (80%) than among Catholics and Protestants (16%).

14.02 An article dated 27 December 2005, published by the Women’s UN Report Network, noted:

“Thirty practitioners of female circumcision in Abidjan have publicly laid aside their blades, knives and scissors… The decision by the thirty to renounce their trade during a ceremony in Abidjan earlier this month marked the first instance in which ONEF (National Organisation for the Child, the Woman and the Family) had managed to convince some of the 75 identified circumcisers working in Abidjan to quit the profession. They had been circumcising girls and women despite the fact that circumcision was banned by a 1998 law… Female circumcision is practiced in several regions of the country… Although it was once restricted to villages and remote hamlets, FGM has since developed into an urban phenomenon as well; men have become involved in the practice, and different excision techniques have evolved”. (UK Home Office (20 June 2008) – Country of Origin Information Report: Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), p.22)

A November 2007 news article from Inter Press Service News Agency (IPS), states:

“In certain parts of Africa, female genital mutilation (FGM) has been linked to religion, with Muslim communities mistakenly believing that the practice is a religious requirement. But in Côte d’Ivoire, religion is also being put at the service of fighting FGM.

El Hadj Kassoum Traoré, an imam at a small mosque in Belleville - one of the poorer areas in the commercial hub of Abidjan - sets aside time during the Friday prayer for explaining the dangers of FGM to worshippers. The weekly prayer is an obligation for able Muslim men.
Since beginning his battle against FGM almost two months ago, Traoré has also called on believers to refrain from having their daughters mutilated, and to condemn those who practice FGM - sometimes referred to as female circumcision. In addition, he has asked circumcisors to stop carrying out FGM.

Each week, Traoré meets elders from the Muslim community of the area to debate circumcision.

"The practice of excision isn't authorised anywhere in the Koran or the Bible," he told IPS. "This is a traditional and customary practice...But the risks (of FGM) are such that we must think of putting an end to it." (Inter Press Service News Agency (IPS) (05 November 2007) – Rights – Cote d'Ivoire: Fighting FGM from Mosque and Pulpit Zamble, Fulgence)

A November 2005 Africa News article states:

“Thirty practitioners of female circumcision in the Ivorian financial capital, Abidjan, have publicly laid aside their blades, knives and scissors. This is the result of an ongoing campaign in the West African country to eradicate the practice, estimated by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to affect 40 percent of women living there.

The campaign, underway for a decade now, is led by the National Organisation for the Child, the Woman and the Family (Organisation nationale pour l'enfant, la femme et la famille, ONEF), a non-governmental group.

The decision by the 30 to renounce their trade during a ceremony in Abidjan earlier this month marked the first instance in which ONEF had managed to convince some of the 75 identified circumcisors working in Abidjan to quit the profession. They had been circumcising girls and women despite the fact that circumcision was banned by a 1998 law." (Africa News (29 November 2005) – Cote d'Ivoire; The Kindest Cut of All – Severing a Harmful Tradition)

A June 2001 United States Department of State report on Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting, under the heading ‘Practice’, states:

“The form of female genital mutilation (FGM) or female genital cutting (FGC) practiced in Cote d'Ivoire is Type II (commonly referred to as excision). The practice is prevalent among Muslim women and is also deeply rooted in traditional Animist initiation rites in western, central and northern Cote d'Ivoire. It crosses ethnic and socioeconomic lines. Some believe the practice seldom occurred among the original population but was imported by immigrants from neighboring countries.” (United States Department of State (01 June 2001) - Cote d'Ivoire: Report on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Female Genital Cutting (FGC))

The same report under the heading ‘Incidence’, states:
“According to a 1999 Demographic and Health Survey of 3,040 women nationally, 44.5 percent of the women of Cote d'Ivoire have undergone Type II.

Informing the public about the harmful effects of this practice, imposing legal sanctions on those that perform it or let their children be excised and other factors, however, are slowly attenuating the practice. It is found particularly among the rural populations in the north, center and west of Cote d'Ivoire.

Generally speaking, this practice occurs among two often overlapping groups: Muslim women and women undergoing Animist initiation rites. Muslim groups include the northern Mande (Malinke, Foula, Bambara, Dioula) and some members of the Voltaic groups (Senufo, Tagwana, Djimini, Lobi, Birifor, Koulango) of the north. The southern Mande of the west (Dan, Yacouba, Toura, Gouro), many of whom are not Muslim, the We from the Krou group and Baoule in some villages surrounding the central city of Bouake also practice FGM/FGC. Some Muslim leaders condemn it as not taught by the Quran.” (Ibid)

References:

Africa News (29 November 2005) – Cote d’Ivoire; The Kindest Cut of All – Severing a Harmful Tradition http://www.lexisnexis.com/uk/nexis/auth/checkbrowser.do?t=1239975102688&bc=1
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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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