

Brussels, 6 February 2007

## **European Commission calls for increasing international mobilization against female genital mutilation**

Development Commissioner Louis Michel today welcomed the increasing mobilization of the international community to combat female genital mutilation. Since a long time, the European Commission has made a priority of this in its political dialogue with the developing countries.

Marking the International Day for Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation, Commissioner Michel said: "*We call on the entire international community to join us in supporting the movement for eradication of this abominable mutilation. This is a human rights issue. Let us all use the means at our disposal to make this mutilation a thing of the past. Campaigning once a year is just not enough. It may be good for some consciences, but it's just not enough.* The European Commission seizes every opportunity available to take up the matter *in its political dialogue with its partners in the developing countries'* and we expects others to do so."

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, about two million young women are still subjected to genital mutilation every year. They risk death and, if they survive their injury, they face the prospect of disability and very risky childbirths. Most people still think this mutilation is something that happens only in Africa, the Middle East and some Asian countries. In fact, increasing mobility of populations from those parts of the world means we are seeing growing numbers of women cut in the European Union.

"Poverty and gender inequality are at the roots of this profound violation of women's rights. Our answer must be to encourage the empowerment of women through education and through efficient enforcement of laws against mutilation. Once women understand the profound consequences that mutilation can have for health and wellbeing, they will be able to make informed choices about whether to accept traditional cutting of their daughters", Commissioner Michel added.

Encouraging is that many African countries have already enacted laws criminalising genital mutilation.

### **Background**

World Health Organisation estimate that 150 million women and girls have been subjected to this practise and that an additional 2 million girls are at risk of being subjected annually. This corresponds to 5500 mutilations per day. Female genital mutilation (FGM) has consequences for pregnancies and childbirth and women which have been subject to cutting are more likely to end up with obstetric fistula. FGM is prevalent in 28 African countries, in a few Arab and Asian countries and among some African immigrants in Europe and the US. 14 African countries have enacted laws criminalising FGM. Most countries have today legislation in place prohibiting FGM, but enforcement of these laws is difficult in particular in rural areas.

Female genital mutilation is one of the inter-related human rights and sexual and reproductive health problems the EU is committed to address as part of its policy for

providing support in developing countries. This is a highly sensitive issue in many countries difficult to address as most deep rooted traditions are.

There is a specific commitment to eradicate female genital mutilation in the Cotonou Agreement with 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. Partnership countries should ensure that FGM is eliminated. Under the Cotonou Agreement the political dialogue between the Commission and the partner countries include human rights issues.

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