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## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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05 May 2003

### BFA41484.FE

Burkina Faso: Excision and female genital mutilation (FGM) in Burkina Faso, in particular among the Gourmantché; measures taken by the authorities to discourage these practices; the customary age at which excision is practised

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Several sources confirm that female genital mutilation (FGM) is practised widely in Burkina Faso (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003) by most of the main ethnic groups, except for the Bella group and castes, and some secret societies (United States 2001, 28). The prevalence of the practice is estimated to be between 60 and 72 per cent (*Win News* Winter 2003; IPU 2 June 2002; United States 2001, 28; *Le Monde diplomatique* Sept. 1998).

Quoting a 1996 investigation, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) gave the following information:

[IPU English version]

Depending on the province, excision is practiced very heavily or exclusively in 14 of the 45 provinces of Burkina Faso: Kéné Dougou, Yatenga, Sanmatenga, Comoé, Bougouriba, Poni, Bam, Soum, Ganzourgou, Gnagna, Kouritenga, Namentenga, Sourou, Zoundwéogo. Removal of the clitoris and of the labia minora is the most common form. Excision is performed between 0 and 7 years, but is increasingly performed on seven-day-old infant girls so that they will not remember the pain (2 June 2002).

Certain sources consulted by the Research Directorate mentioned the commitment of the Burkinan government to halt the practice of FGM (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003; United States 2001, 28; IPU 2 June 2002; *Le Monde diplomatique* Sept. 1998).

In October 1988, the government created a National Committee for the Fight Against Excision (IPU 2 June 2002). By presidential decree in 1990,

[IPU English version]

this body became an interministerial structure tasked with gradually eliminating the practice of excision in Burkina Faso once and for all. It brings together in an institutional framework the representatives of various ministries, associations, NGOs, youth and human rights movements, tribal leaders, and religious communities. It is under the administrative supervision of the Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity and is self-managing. Activities are carried out in the 45 provinces and include the following: information, education and awareness-building; training; remedial care for harmful after-effects; research; advocacy, follow-up, evaluation and supervision (ibid.).

The excision of girls has been considered a criminal offence since 1996 (United States 2001, 28). To this

effect, the government enacted Law No. 043/96/ADP of 13 November 1996 amending the Penal Code; the articles relating to excision are reproduced in full below:

[translation]

Article 380. Every person who violates or attempts to violate the physical integrity of the female genital organ by total ablation, excision, infibulation, desensitization, or any other means shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of six months to three years or a fine ranging from 150,000 to 900,000 francs, or both.

Should the offence result in death, the punishment shall be imprisonment for a term of five to ten years.

Article 381. The maximum punishment shall be imposed if the guilty person is a member of the medical or paramedical profession. The competent authority may also prohibit the guilty person from practising his profession for a period of not more than five years.

Article 382. Every person who has knowledge of the acts described in Article 380 and who fails to notify the competent authorities shall be punished by a fine of not less than 50,000 francs and not more than 100,000 francs (Burkina Faso 13 Nov. 1996).

Another source provided the following information on the measures taken by the Burkinian authorities:

[IPU English version]

Further to a question put in Parliament and at the initiative of the women MPs, in December 2001, the National Assembly allocated an additional sum of CFA francs 20 million to the National Committee to assist it in executing its programme of action. Following a training seminar, tribal leaders undertook to set up a support committee to carry out awareness-building activities throughout the country at the cantonal and village level. Likewise, Islamic associations set up a support committee which carried out awareness-building activities in the mosques and other public places throughout the country with the support of 205 preachers who were given special training and who strive to demystify the religious basis for the practice of excision (IPU 2 June 2002).

According to *Le Monde diplomatique*, [translation] "in 1997, several 'practitioners' and their accomplices were brought before the courts and received sentences of up to five months in jail and a fine of CFA 50,000 francs" (Sept. 1998).

According to *Sidwaya*, the Islamic community is the most reluctant to abandon the practice (5 Mar. 2003). As a result, the National Committee for the Fight Against Excision reportedly held a training session on 4 March 2003 [translation] "for Franco-Arab school teachers from 10 provinces in Burkina Faso, on the subject of genital mutilations ... to mentally prepare teachers to introduce the topic of female genital mutilation into the primary and secondary curriculums at Franco-Arab schools in Burkina Faso" (*Sidwaya* 5 Mar. 2003.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate 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 find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### References

Burkina Faso. 13 November 1996. Loi no 043/96/ADP du 13 novembre 1996 portant Code pénal. *Journal officiel du Burkina Faso*, Vol. 29. No. 1. <<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/population/fgm/Burkina.fgm.htm>> [Accessed 2 May 2003]

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United States. 2001. Department of State. *Prevalence of the Practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM ); Laws Prohibiting FGM and Their Enforcement; Recommendations on How to Best Work to Eliminate FGM* . Report on Female Genital Mutilation prepared by the Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues, Office of the Under Secretary for Global Affairs.

*Women's International Network (WIN News )*. Winter 2003. Vol. 29, no. 1. "Seven W African Countries Adopt Action Plan Against Violence." (NEXIS)

#### Additional Sources Consulted

*Africa Confidential*

Africa Research Bulletin : *Political, Cultural and Social Series*

Afrique/Asie

L'Autre Afrique

Keesing's Record of World Events

New African

Resource Centre country file. Burkina Faso

#### **Internet sites :**

Africa News

*L'Hebdomadaire du Burkina Faso*

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