

Dear friends, activists, fellow speakers, distinguished guests, good morning.

First of all I would like to thank TERRE DES FEMMES for inviting me to provide the opening remarks for this important conference. I am delighted to be here today and to learn about the work the CHANGE Project has accomplished.

I became a goodwill ambassador for TERRE DES FEMMES because I am dedicated to the fight against the harmful practice of Female Genital Mutilation. So I decided to give my voice to all those girls and women who cannot speak up against the deprivation of their basic human rights. Rights, which are universal to all citizens of this world. FGM is a form of domination over women and the practice should neither be ignored nor excused under any circumstances. And yet, I recognise that the reasons behind FGM are very complex and deeply rooted in tradition. So how can we end FGM?

Christa Stolle just talked about the prevalence rate of FGM. It should be clear by now that FGM is not an African problem - but a global problem to which we need to find global solutions.

The Executive Director of UN Women, Michelle Bachelet, once said that to end FGM we need "the active engagement of all segments of society, including women and girls, men and boys, young people [...] community and faith-based organizations and leaders as well as the media. [...]" But if we want to succeed, she said, the communities themselves play a central role.

And it appears to me that this is exactly what the CHANGE Project is about: Engaging Diaspora communities in the European Union in the fight to end FGM through training, direct participation and empowerment.

I am looking forward to listen to the experiences of the community workers here today and the work this project has accomplished.

Thank you very much for your attention, I wish you an interesting and productive conference day.