

## Raise your Voice: Join Singer Angélique Kidjo Against Brutality

Natasha Lardera (February 23, 2012)



The Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations, in collaboration with the United Nations, UNFPA and UNICEF brings to the United Nations Grammy Award-winning Beninese singer-songwriter and activist to bring awareness on a current plague: female genital mutilation. The show is produced by Massimo Gallotta Productions.

[The Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations](#) [2], in collaboration with the [United Nations](#) [3], [UNFPA](#) [4] and [UNICEF](#) [5] brings to the United Nations [Grammy Award](#) [6]-winning Beninese singer-songwriter and activist [Angélique Kidjo](#) [7] February 28, 2012, at 7.00 P.M. The concert, produced by Massimo Gallotta productions, to be held in the General Assembly Hall, has an important purpose: raise the voice against female genital mutilation, a plague that affects much of the continent of Africa. This ancient practice strikes both Westerners and many Africans as inhuman, as it coexists



side by side with modernity, and shows no sign of imminent abandonment.

Angélique Kidjo was born in Cotonou, Benin. She grew up listening to Beninese traditional music and great artists such as [Mirima Makeba](#) [8], James Brown, [Otis Redding](#) [9], [Jimi Hendrix](#) [10], [Stevie Wonder](#) [11] and [Santana](#) [12]. "By the time she was six, Kidjo was performing with her mother's theatre troupe, giving her an early appreciation for traditional music and dance. She started singing in her school band Les Sphinx and found success as a teenager with her adaptation of Mirima Makeba's "Les Trois Z" which played on national radio. She recorded the album *Pretty* with the Cameroonian producer Ekambi Brilliant and her brother Oscar. It featured the songs *Ninive*, *Gbe Agossi* and a tribute to the singer Bella Bellow, one of her role models. The success of the album allowed her to tour all over West Africa. Continuing political conflicts in Benin prevented her from being an independent artist in her own country and led her to relocate to Paris in 1983," wikipedia reports. In Paris she studied music and started out as a backup singer in local bands. She steadily built a musical career, with a series of increasingly successful albums for western labels.

"Her fame as a musician has given her a platform for advocacy," David Honigmann wrote in an interview published in the [Financial Times](#) [13], "She has campaigned for Oxfam and for Mo Ibrahim's governance foundation. She works almost compulsively as a Unicef Goodwill Ambassador, and has established a foundation for women's rights and education. 'Before I started working for Unicef I'd already written songs about human rights, children's rights, women's rights. Those are the things that affect me, that I grew up with as an African person.' She is uncompromisingly feminist. 'There's no way in the Bible or Koran that women should be covered from head to toe, should be looked at with contempt.'"

The artist, who is a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, was an obvious choice to "raise the voice against FGM."

"Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The practice is mostly carried out by traditional circumcisers, who often play other central roles in communities, such as attending childbirths. However, more than 18% of all FGM is performed by health care providers, and this trend is increasing. FGM is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women.

It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It is nearly always carried out on minors and is a violation of the rights of children. The practice also violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity, the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to life when the procedure results in death," the [World Health Organization](#) [14] explains in its website ([www.who.int](http://www.who.int) [15]). FGM has both immediate and long-term harmful consequences to the health of women, including severe bleeding, urination problems, infections, infertility and childbirth complications. "The causes of female genital mutilation include a mix of cultural, religious and social factors within families and communities... FGM is associated with cultural ideals of femininity and modesty, which include the notion that girls are 'clean' and 'beautiful' after removal of body parts that are considered 'male' or 'unclean.' Though no religious scripts prescribe the practice, practitioners often believe the practice has religious support."

According to the WHO, 100–140 million women and girls are living with FGM, including 92 million girls over the age of 10 in Africa. The practice persists in 28 African countries, as well as in the Arabian Peninsula, where Types I and II are more common. It is known to exist in northern Saudi Arabia, southern Jordan, northern Iraq, and possibly Syria, western Iran, and southern Turkey. It is also practiced in Indonesia, but largely symbolically. Several African countries have enacted legislation against it, including Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Togo, and Uganda.

At least 3 million girls are at risk of undergoing the practice every year.



"Female genital mutilation has nothing to do with culture, tradition or religion. It is torture and a crime. Help us to put an end to this crime." Waris Dirie, Somali model, author, actress and human rights activist is quoted saying on [www.stop-fgm-now.com](http://www.stop-fgm-now.com) [16], the site of a campaign that unites associations, companies and private persons in an effort to put an end to this barbarian crime.

The concert will be streamed live through the official [UN Webcast](http://www.un.org/webcast) [17] and on Time Warner channel 150 in the New York City area. For the first time ever, the UN is offering 50 pairs of tickets to the general public in the New York area through a contest through the official UN Twitter account. For information go to: <http://www.un.org/en/endfgm/> [18]

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