



Italy's Commitment to Women Empowerment Testified by Fornero's Visit to the UN

Francesca Giuliani (February 27, 2012)



Labor, Social Policies and Gender Equality Minister of Italy Elsa Fornero is in New York to attend the annual meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. "Overcoming barriers is easier for women," she told the press today, and spoke about Italy's commitment against female genital mutilation.

"It's easier for women to overcome barriers, to avoid formalities, to speak about problems and of the possibility of solving them together." This is what Italy's Labor, Social Policies and Gender Equality Minister [Elsa Fornero](#) [2] Fornero told Italian journalists in New York today at a press conference held in the office of the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations.



Fornero, visiting the US to attend the annual meeting of the [UN Commission on the Status of Women](#) [3], spent the morning in bilateral meetings with the appointed representatives to the Commission of China, Brasil and Burkina Faso, and with US State Department's Ambassador-at-large for Global Women's Issues Melanne Vermeer, appointed in 2009 by President Obama.

"These meetings took me to very different geographical realities, but we never felt any barriers between us," the Minister added.

Speaking about the issue of [female genital mutilation](#) [4], and about Italy's commitment to having the UN General Assembly adopt a resolution to condemn it, Fornero stated: "I am convinced that Italy is working very well on this subject, respecting other countries' internal affairs on which it's impossible to intervene. However, I do believe that a gentle pressure might lead to positive results, and it's what I expect."

The Minister wishes that the resolution will be adopted within 2012, and assured Italy's utmost commitment to the goal.

To raise awareness on the issue of female genital mutilation, a violation of human rights perpetrated on children and teenagers up to 15 years of age for non-medical reasons like religious beliefs and social conventions, and affecting over 92 million African girls ages 10 and up, Minister Fornero will participate tomorrow evening in a concert sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations.

The concert, which will be held at the UN Headquarters, will feature the performance of beninois singer and Grammy award winner Angelique Kidjo, who is also a goodwill ambassador for the UN.

Elaborating on the strategies to fight the occurrence of female genital mutilation among the population of immigrants living in Italy, Fornero stated that "in Italy this practice is illegal but it is secretly committed, which makes it harder to fight. It is extremely important to have people understand that this is a barbaric custom and that in no way should the beliefs of parents impose the sacrifice of daughters, whom are left with unbearable long-term psychological consequences."

Education is also fundamental for the eradication of another social issue affecting women in Italy: domestic violence. The role of the media is under scrutiny: "If women are presented as objects rather than as autonomous subjects, they will be more exposed to such risk," Fornero argued, and added that her Ministry has commissioned the Italian National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT) to research the phenomenon in order to quantify its incidence.

"Knowledge is key to tackling the issue with effective policies," Fornero said.

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