



## Foreign Affairs Committee

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**From the Chair**  
Tom Tugendhat MP

His Excellency Francis Blain  
Gambian High Commissioner  
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29 September 2020

Dear High Commissioner,

I am writing on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Committee to raise our concerns regarding reported increases in instances of female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage in The Gambia. Both practices were outlawed, in 2015 and 2016 respectively, and were a significant step forward in protecting the rights of women and girls.

Whilst these laws are still in force, there have been no prosecutions for either crime to date. This gives a worrying impression that those who commit these human rights violations will not be held to account.

For girls and women who undergo these practices the psychological, emotional and medical consequences are often devastating. We are extremely concerned to hear reports of a resurgence in both of these practices, UNICEF's most recent data shows that large numbers of Gambian women and children have been subjected to these practices, with 75% of Gambian girls reported to have undergone FGM, whilst a third were married as children.

We are concerned that the President has yet to speak out publicly against these practices. At this important juncture, with an increase in both FGM and child marriage due to girls being out of school because of COVID-19, it's vital that that the President eliminates any ambiguity on issues relating to carrying out any form of violence against girls with impunity.

We hope that your country will re-affirm its commitment to ending violence against women and girls and urge the President to clearly state that the country will either adhere to the existing laws, or enact new laws in response to the new era of democracy, which puts the promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls at the heart of its government's policies.

Best wishes,

**TOM TUGENDHAT**