

Alþingi
Kirkjustræti
150 Reykjavík

April 15, 2018.

Dear Ministers

Circumcision of Male Minors

I find myself in the sombre position of preparing a statement that I wish had been presented to my parents before I was born in 1957, regarding an issue that has greatly affected me and the life that I have lived.

It is to my mind indefensible that parents can dictate to their infant son that a normal, healthy, functional, erogenous body part be amputated before he even knows he is born. As we know, this is not the case in respect of females. My younger sister who was born in 1959, as far as I am aware, still has the intact genitals she was born with.

It was flagrant sex discrimination in 1957, and still is in the 21st century that girls are now legally protected from any violation of their bodily integrity in many countries (including my place of birth, the UK), and yet boys are not.

This is a question of human dignity. Is it dignified for a civilised society to condone the routine body modification of its most vulnerable and defenceless citizens before they even know they are born, such as animals are routinely subjected to genital surgery? These are people who are most in need of the respect, care and protection that society can afford, and are being ignored by a society that has bought into the notion that parents know what's best for their children, regardless of their religious or cultural beliefs which often motivate them to cut their children's genitals. Although apparently those parents who would propose to cut the genitals of their daughters do not seem to know what's best for their children?

The fact that my genitals were interfered with whilst I was an infant and part of my penis was cut off my body is tantamount to state sponsored rape in my opinion, and that of many other men who were subjected to the indignity of neonatal circumcision. The consequence of living life with part of my penis missing is that a profoundly insidious and detrimental effect on my sexuality and sexual relations has prevailed, and will continue to for the rest of my days.

I do not dispute that an estimated one third of the male population of the world is circumcised and the vast majority of them are apparently content with their circumcised status. However, it greatly troubles me that the vast majority of those men had no option as to whether or not their foreskin was amputated without their consent. I wonder how many circumcised men there would be in the world if every one was able to choose as an adult? Despite all the rhetoric from the pro-circumcision lobby and the religious zealots, there are undoubtedly many circumcised men, in addition to myself, who would rather have been given the opportunity to live their lives with the intact genitals they had at birth. My parents were catholics, but I know of men whose parents are Jews and Muslims that also resent the fact that they were circumcised as infants or minors, before they had attained sufficient maturity to give legitimate consent to the irreversible surgical modification of their bodies.

The implication to my mind is that society perceives males are born with a surplus body part that is an optional extra that can be amputated without any consequence to the individual. Whereas females are apparently born with no surplus body parts. They are born with nothing more nor less than is needed for a normal sex life. This view is anathema to me as a man, and I believe insulting to all men whether or not they are circumcised. I conclude that we are deemed to be inferior beings. I firmly believe, and I am not alone in my thinking, that there is great value in the whole unmodified genital apparatus that a man is naturally endowed with at birth, and that it should be the personal decision of every male, and not that of his parents, as to whether or not any body part is sacrificed as an act of faith, or to conform with cultural mores, as and when he has attained adulthood.

I looked on with great interest in 2012 as the public debate about this issue reverberated around Germany and also the rest of the world. At long last the matter would be decided, and I anticipated that my position on this issue would be vindicated by politicians who are elected to do what is right and proper in a world in which there is rightly much consideration of children's rights and equality of the sexes and opposition to sex discrimination. Needless to say I was appalled when the vote was announced, and felt like a second class citizen who had been metaphorically knifed in the genitals yet again.

I note however that the Bundestag vote was not unanimous. 434 voted in favour of parents who choose to circumcise their infant/minor sons as part of their human right to freely exercise religious expression. However, 100 voted against the motion. Presumably they were effectively voting in favour of the right of every boy to enjoy physical integrity and to choose for himself whether or not to be circumcised for whatever motive?

I often wonder how representative of society as a whole our parliamentarians actually are? I have seen a number of polls from Germany, Denmark and in the UK which suggest that the majority of ordinary people believe that the circumcision of children for non-therapeutic reasons should be banned. Notwithstanding this apparent paradox, it is my contention that it is not a question that should be put to a vote by parliamentarians or society as a whole. The majority of people don't have to live in my body or the body of any other man who was circumcised without his personal consent. Each of us may be a minority in the whole of society, but we are the majority of people who live in our own bodies, actually we are the only person living in that body.

Despite the fact that we live in a modern democratic society where the will of the majority prevails, within the UN there is the power of veto for the five permanent members of the security council. This is seen by critics, since its creation in 1945, as the most undemocratic character of the UN. However, it persists because those member states enjoy the power that they have secured and are unlikely to give it up anytime soon. It is my belief that I and every individual should enjoy the power of veto over those who would impose their will on us with impunity as to whether or not we live our lives with the whole body we are born with.

Angela Merkel infamously remarked that Germany could become a laughing stock if it failed to overturn the Cologne court decision. Accordingly, the Bundestag cynically enacted legislation to appease the religious lobby, and which some legal experts believe is unconstitutional. Let Iceland rise above such shameful hypocrisy and move to the moral high ground as the first of the 195 nations that are signatories of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to give full equality to all its citizens by upholding their inalienable right to genital autonomy and self determination. What an accolade! I warmly applaud Silja Dögg Gunnarsdóttir for proposing that this matter be debated in the Alþingi in order that the anomalous provisions in the existing legislation can be revised. May Iceland venture into the uncharted waters that all other nations in this world full of smug self-

righteousness have hitherto dared not navigate. I await the outcome of your deliberations with keen anticipation.

Yours sincerely

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