

To the government of Iceland

Dear Sirs/Madams,

We write to you because we are gravely concerned about the prospect of a potential legal ban on ritual circumcision of boys in Iceland. We fear that, whereas such a ban may not have far-reaching consequences in Iceland due to the very limited number of Muslims and Jews in that country, a legal ban could potentially have severely negative consequences for Jews and Muslims in other Scandinavian and European countries.

We note that certain claims in the proposed bill are incorrect. Firstly, the Danish Medical Association, while deeming non-medical circumcision unethical because there is no medical basis for the procedure, specifically does NOT recommend a legal ban. The reason for this is the recognition that a legal ban will have severe and unpredictable consequences.

The comparison in the Icelandic bill between male non-medical circumcision and female genital mutilation (FGM) is completely unfounded. FGM is almost universally condemned and banned, and the World Health Organization (WHO) and many other international organizations and NGO's have been working for decades to convince the practitioners of FGM to abolish the practice. Male circumcision, by contrast, is legal in every country in the world, and a third of all men on the planet are circumcised.

Several other statements in the bill appear to be founded in misunderstandings regarding the procedure itself. For instance, only very few Muslims circumcise at age 10 or older. Most Muslims circumcise boys at a much younger age, and there is an increasing tendency to circumcise early among most Muslim ethnic groups.

The former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, visited Denmark in 2015 and 2016. In his report to the United Nations' General Assembly, Mr. Bielefeldt unambiguously states that non-medical circumcision of boys as a religious ritual is included in the religious rights of the parents, as well as in the rights of the child to be raised within the religion and cultural tradition of his parents and family. Mr. Bielefeldt also states that freedom of religion is one of basic universal human rights.

In June 2016, the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review recommended that Denmark "refrain from banning or setting age limit on non-therapeutic circumcision of boys" (art. 120.143). The Danish government accepted the recommendation.

https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/denmark/session_24_-_january_2016/recommendations_and_pledges_denmark_2016_0.pdf

The proposed bill has the potential to wreak havoc on communities and families belonging to ethnic and religious minorities in other Scandinavian countries and all over Europe by turning a mainly harmless and widespread practice into grounds for criminalization and imprisonment.

Therefore, we urge the Icelandic government to reconsider, and we highly recommend that you consult with the Jewish and Muslim communities in Iceland to clear up misunderstandings regarding the procedure. We also recommend that you consult with recognized and non-biased international medical experts, for example within the WHO.

Faithfully yours,

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