

Alþingi
Kirkjustræti
150 Reykjavík

March 26, 2017

Ágæta Alþingi / Dear Members of the Parliament

Efni: Umsögn um frumvarp til laga um breytingu á almennum hegningarlögum (bann við umskurði drengja), 148. löggjafarþing, 114. mál. / Regarding the proposed legislation banning non-therapeutic circumcision

I am writing in support of the proposed limit on non-therapeutic circumcisions to persons 18 years and older.

If the custom of amputating parts of a child's healthy genitals did not exist and someone tried to introduce it today for religious or cultural reasons or by claiming "potential health benefits", there would be worldwide outcry and laws would be passed immediately to stop its spread. It would be recognized as the abusive practice that it is. Sadly, this barbaric custom does exist and those now attempting to protect children from this harmful practice are being defamed as anti-semitic, Islamophobic and akin to Nazis.

I urge Iceland to rise above this defamatory rhetoric and to stand up for the clear human rights, equal rights and medical ethics which are at stake here.

I am from the UK but, for over a decade have lived in the United States. I am an "intactivist" and I fight for the human rights of boys to keep their whole genitals, to be given the same protection as girls and for doctors to abide by basic standards of medical ethics if they are asked to amputate healthy parts of boys' genitals.

Circumcision Violates Basic Standards of Medical Ethics

Much of the rhetoric and criticism of Iceland's proposal emanates from the United States and the United States prides itself on its power to influence other nations. Given how deeply

circumcision is culturally entrenched in the United States, it is not surprising that Iceland will be subjected to a large amount of pressure from the United States. Icelandic lawmakers should be aware that Americans who speak out against the proposal - while they may frame their objections in religious freedom terms for Jews and Muslims - are also defending their own non-religious bias and belief in myths that a circumcised penis is “healthier” “cleaner” and that the procedure is “harmless”.

American doctors are complete outliers in the developed world on the issue of genital cutting and I have seen, first hand, while giving birth to two boys in the United States, how greedily they promote and solicit the genital mutilation of boys and present it as a “normal” part of being a boy in the United States. Indeed, many American doctors and nurses, when asked why they are soliciting this medically unnecessary surgery, state that boys should have their genitals altered at birth to “match dad” or “fit in in the locker room”. It simply never occurs to them that in the absence of disease, amputating a healthy, functional part of a boy’s genitals without his consent, violates basic standards of medical ethics.

American doctors are nonchalant about anesthesia - and despite clear medical evidence of the pain of circumcision, continue to perform this surgery with no anesthetic or anesthetic that has been shown to be ineffective. Moreover, they obfuscate and dismiss the complications of this procedure as “rare” while at the same time admitting that “the true incidence of complications... is unknown” [American Academy of Pediatrics Task Force on Circumcision. Male circumcision. Pediatrics. 2012;130(3)]. Bizarrely, despite not knowing the risks the American Academy of Pediatrics felt qualified to tell the American public that the “health benefits of newborn male circumcision outweigh the risks”.

Clearly, what was and remains of utmost importance to the American Academy of Pediatrics is that health insurance continues to pay for a medically unnecessary procedure. In their 2012 report they asserted that the so-called potential health benefits “warrant third-party reimbursement of the procedure”. In this way, American doctors can continue to profit. Circumcision is a multi-billion dollar industry in the United States for the pediatricians and obstetrician/gynecologists who perform it on approximately 3000 boys daily. It is particularly profitable for the pediatric urologists who deal with the botches and complications. Boys are scarred for life and those who grow up and complain about what was done to them are dismissed and mocked by society for daring to complain.

I had no idea that a so-called advanced nation could be so willfully blind until I met my American husband and discovered that this is what Americans do to their boys at birth. My husband is circumcised and an intactivist. We protected our sons - which, in the case of our first son, involved my husband having to argue with a nurse about removing him from the hospital circumcision schedule - something she insisted only a doctor could do!

I urge Icelandic lawmakers to listen to doctors in the rest of the developed world outside the United States who do not have a vested cultural, religious or financial interest in circumcision but can take an objective view on the pain, complications, harm, and ethics of amputating healthy, functional parts of boys' genitals.

Equal Rights Issues

Female genital mutilation ("FGM") has been banned in most parts of the developed world, including Iceland, and it is preposterous to claim that boys do not deserve the same protection. There are many forms of FGM - including practices much less invasive than male circumcision such as ritual nicks of the clitoris or clitoral hood (prepuce). All forms of FGM are outlawed. It is therefore the height of hypocrisy to claim that the foreskin (male prepuce) can be completely amputated from a boy when we take such a restrictive view of FGM. We are almost a quarter of the way through the 21st century, and it is time to do away with such harmful double standards.

Human Rights to Bodily Integrity and Religious Freedom

It is not reasonable to claim that the human right to religious freedom outranks the human right to bodily integrity. People are not free to kill in the name of religion, nor should they be free to maim in the name of religion. Being born without a foreskin is a birth defect called Aposthia. How can it be claimed that anyone has a right to mimic a birth defect on a child?

Religious groups with a vested interest in the practice claim that circumcision is "harmless". This is blatantly untrue. Not only does it ignore all those who have suffered a botched circumcision or complications from a circumcision, it ignores the fact that the amputation of a healthy, functional, erogenous part of a boy's genitals is, per se, harm. Even if the procedure is not botched or the boy never suffers a complication, he is still missing a body part and is deprived of its functions including its function during masturbation and intercourse and its protection of the glans. Circumcision harms boys and religion should not be used as a

justification for allowing it. Indeed, the ban on FGM, a largely Islamic practice, shows that religious and cultural freedom regarding children's genitals has already been regulated on the grounds of the harm that it inflicts.

In short, all rights and freedoms have limits. In a civilized, enlightened society, freedom of religion must end where someone else's body starts. Those who wish to offer up body parts as part of their religion or culture should be free to offer up their own body parts but not those of children.

Iceland should stand firm in protecting boys from a medically unnecessary, harmful and unethical surgery and put them on an equal footing with the protection given to girls. Boys should be allowed the same open future as girls and, upon reaching 18, decide for themselves if they would like genital surgery for any perceived religious, cultural, health, aesthetic or other reasons that they consider important enough to warrant it.

Sincerely,

Sarah Rouse
Rockville Centre, NY, USA.