

Female Genital Mutilation

- What Can You Do to Stop this Abhorrent Practice?

There are only anecdotal references to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) taking place in Australia. However it is generally believed that incidents do occur, the child being mutilated in her own state, taken interstate or overseas. Such incidents are, of course, surrounded by secrecy.

Children must be protected against this violation of their rights, and DCI is keeping up-to-date on this very important issue. As an active member of DCI, I am compiling information and am in contact with all state coordinators of the Programme in order to do this.

The FGM Programme, through each State/Territory FGM Reference Group, serves an important role in educating the medical profession, services providers and the community at large on how to handle incidents with sensitivity. However, it is now essential that all States and Territories have effective complementary legislation.

The National Education Programme on FGM, established 3 years ago, aims to prevent the practice in Australia through education, information and support. At this stage only ACT, NSW, SA and Victoria have legislation prohibiting the practice. These state laws prohibit FGM within the state, and also prohibit the removal of a child to another state or to another country to perform the mutilation. Qld, WA, NT and Tasmania do not have any legislation which prohibits the practice the FGM, although under child protection policies some action can be taken. This is not adequate.

One measure which would very effectively

protect children from FGM would be to require adult migrants from relevant countries to sign a Statutory Declaration stating that they will not allow FGM to be carried out on a child.

The Minister for Immigration should take a firm stand on this immediately. Please write to the Federal Minister for Immigration and the Minister for Health in your state/territory in support of these further measures.

Alena Almassy



... on the issue of male genital mutilation ...

DCI has at last received a response to its letter to the Attorney-General on this subject, which was reported in the last issue of *Australian Children's Rights News*.

The following is an extract from the reply provided by Nick Grono, Advisor to the Attorney-General:

".. female circumcision, in particular the practice of infibulation, is a far more extensive operation than male circumcision and can result in severe injury to the victims of this practice ... Unlike female circumcision, there is no undisputed evidence that male circumcision causes lasting medical, psychological or emotional trauma ... Male circumcision has not attracted widespread condemnation from the international community or declaration that the practice must be stopped.

It is appropriate, therefore, that the issues of male and female circumcision be handled separately and appropriately in accordance with community and international expectations."