



MEDIA RELEASE 6 October 2013

A BIG WEEK FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS TO GENITAL PROTECTION

This week saw two boosts for the rights of children everywhere, according to the newly formed **AUSTRALASIAN INSTITUTE FOR GENITAL AUTONOMY (AIGA)**.

On **Tuesday** the Parliament of the **Council of Europe** in Strasbourg voted 77/19 confirming that unnecessary surgery is a form of violence against children and breaches their human right to physical integrity:

This includes, amongst others, female genital mutilation, the circumcision of young boys for religious reasons, early childhood medical interventions in the case of intersexual children and the submission to or coercion of children into piercings, tattoos or plastic surgery.

In an unrelated move on **Monday**, a meeting of the Nordic and Baltic **Ombudspersons for Children** in Oslo from 6 countries resolved unanimously that boys should decide for themselves when old enough whether they want to be circumcised.

"Circumcision without a medical indication on a person unable to provide informed consent conflicts with basic principles of medical ethics" said the group, the Scandinavian equivalent of our own Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians (ACCG).

As ombudsmen for children and experts in children's health we consider circumcision of underage boys without a medical indication to be in conflict with the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, article 12, about children's right to express their views about their own matters, and article 24, pt. 3, which says that children must be protected against traditional rituals that may be harmful to their health.

Each year over 2 million girls and over 12 million boys are exposed to the risks of genital unnecessary cutting. Also, 1 or 2 children per 1000 have ambiguous gender at birth and doctors often persuade parents to let them perform genital surgery to "assign a sex" which often clashes with the child's own gender identify as they mature.

In Australia, says **AIGA** spokesperson Paul Mason, genital cutting of girls is rare and criminalized. Some parents still take their daughters overseas to fulfill their own religious and cultural duties and some illegal surgery still takes place here. Each year in Australia 20,000 boys (about 12%) undergo irreversible surgery to their most private part sometimes for one parent's religious beliefs, and rarely for any medical need but usually for no reason at all except parental preference.

Says Mr Mason "The Nordic Children's Ombudspersons restated the principle that parents' rights to carry out religious or traditional rituals do not trump children's rights to physical integrity and choice. They said unnecessary circumcision should be deferred until the boy is old enough to understand and choose. This position should be adopted by Australia's National Children's Commissioner and ACCG. AIGA urges them and the new Health Minister Peter Dutton to examine this part of Australia's human rights obligations to children.

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Media Backgrounding:

Text of COE Resolution:

<http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=20174&lang=en>

Report and text of Nordic Children's Ombudsmen statement:

<http://www.crin.org/resources/infodetail.asp?id=31830>

Text of Tasmanian Law Reform Institute Report:

http://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/302829/Non-Therapeutic-Circ_Final-Report-August-2012.pdf

Google Images:

Circumstraint Board

https://www.google.com.au/search?q=circumstraint&client=safari&rls=en&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=CKxQUoa4OofJiAe_5oDIDg&ved=0CC4QsAQ

Circumcision Instruments:

https://www.google.com.au/search?q=circumstraint&client=safari&rls=en&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=CKxQUoa4OofJiAe_5oDIDg&ved=0CC4QsAQ#q=circumcision+instrument+set&rls=en&tbm=isch

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