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CONSISTENT APPROACH TO CHILD GENITAL CUTTING NEEDED TO REDUCE FGM IN AUSTRALIA

NSW Minister for Family & Community Services Pru Goward's concerns about the hidden prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM) are well founded. Ms Goward argued today that although tough laws are in place, social and cultural conditions need to be addressed to eradicate the "hideous" crime against children.

The Australasian Institute for Genital Autonomy welcomes Ms Goward's suggestion that changing social norms and cultural education are important to protect children's rights to bodily autonomy and self determination.

However, Ms Goward's comments that "immigration authorities have to get much more vigilant about advising communities" about children's rights casts the issue as exclusively a problem for immigrating communities and fails to acknowledge the broader context within current Australian culture and fails to address how to police girls being removed to (for example) South East Asia for religious and cultural "sunat" or genital cutting, including UNICEF/WHO Types I, II (some tissue removed) and Type IV (no tissue removed).

Elwyn Moir, Secretary of the AIGA said today that "it's easy to imagine genital cutting crimes against children are a problem only in foreign cultures; however Ms Goward's argument that social change in Australia is vital highlights the importance of a consistent approach to children's rights to genital autonomy".

AIGA accepts that parents submit their children for genital surgery with the best intentions, but they often overlook that they are irreversibly removing their child's right to their own later freedom to choose.

Law reform reviews in Queensland and Tasmania have suggested clarifying legislation criminalising unnecessary circumcision of boys. In 2013 a Senate Inquiry recommended court supervision of unnecessary surgery on intersex children as their rights to genital autonomy are not protected by supposed parental rights. Vague legislation and out-dated Medicare rebates continue to send mixed signals that perpetuate these human rights abuses.

Mr Moir said "unnecessary genital surgery on boys and intersex children are still confusingly mistaken as parental choices in Australia, which remain a minority practice. To reduce the heinous perpetration of FGM in this country, we need to re-examine our own cultural assumptions and promote the right to mature self-determination and an open future for all children, not just girls."

AIGA takes the UN Charter of Human Rights and Rights of the Child as its starting point and contributes to advancing an ethical approach in our culture to issues of unnecessary surgery on children's genitals.

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References:

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