

## Religious Predators Target Girls?

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For many years, Africans and immigrants from the Middle East have secretly remained faithful to cultural rituals and rights of passage that have been designed to keep their young women chaste and eligible for marriage.

Partial or total female circumcision is one of these practices. In an alarming reversal of protocol and wisdom, this dehumanizing practice is gaining acceptance within the US these days. In fact the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has recommended that American doctors be given permission to perform "ceremonial" female circumcisions.

Once again American leaders are fearfully overcompensating for cultural and religious practices from other lands. America especially seems to be intimidated by rituals found in Islam. There are some cities in the nation that even desire to allow Sharia law to operate in the United States. In that spirit of accommodation, the AAP wants to give pinpricks or to "nick" the genitals of young girls here in the US whose families come from cultures that mandate female circumcisions. The doctors' rationale is that if they perform the lesser procedure here in the States, it would keep their families from sending the girls overseas for full circumcisions.

Before I go further, let me explain exactly what female circumcision is. The biological reason behind this practice is to reduce a girl's sexual desire. Many cultures and religious groups are convinced that this practice will ensure a young woman's virginity until marriage. Removal of all or part of the clitoris is the essence of the female circumcision. The more extensive procedure could also involve stitching the vagina. Reducing the size of the vagina is also intended to increase the husband's enjoyment of the sexual act.

Although the current law "makes criminal any non-medical procedure performed on the genitals" of a girl in the United States, the APA believes that US residents will be discouraged from returning to their homelands for the cruel surgeries often administered by midwives or female village elders.

Thankfully, there are many opponents to female genital mutilations. Joseph Crowley, Democrat of New York, actually introduced a bill that would make it a crime to take a girl overseas for such a purpose. Georgeanne Chapin of Intact America has urged the AAP to avoid moving down a "slippery slope." More specifically she said, "There are countries

in the world that allow wife beating, slavery, and child abuse, but we don't allow people to practice those customs in this country. We don't let people have slavery a little bit because they're going to do it anyway, or beat their wives a little bit because they're going to do it anyway."

Today, the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists report that over 130 million women and girls have undergone female genital cutting. Circumcisions are typically performed on girls under 15-years

old in countries including Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia. Earlier this week, I saw a BBC special from South Africa which had a village "mother" explaining her commitment to cutting the genitals of the younger women with wives tales about their sex organs growing backward inside of their bodies, thus creating long term health problems. Unfortunately, the true story is that there are severe consequences to this surgery. The problems include:

- 1.) severe complications with pregnancy,
- 2.) problems with childbirth, and
- 3.) sexual dysfunction later in life.

Nonetheless, the AAP restates its rationale as follows "in some countries where FGC is common, some progress toward eradication or amelioration has been made by substituting ritual 'nicks' for more severe forms."

America needs to take an about face from our temptation to tiptoe around problems like these. Our national leaders like Eric Holder, US Attorney General, are reticent to "tell it like it is" if another faith -especially Islam - could be seen in a bad light. We must take a different approach and speak out against genuine sexist or dehumanizing practices which can harm our people. We cannot let any faith tradition get away with abusing our citizens - especially children.

We applaud our national desire to allow religious freedom. This openness is something we have all learned from Christianity. Other nations, however, are hardly as open or respectful of human rights.

More specifically let's look at the Muslim faith's track record of religious tolerance. In the Islamic world there are several nations, which have large populations of non-Muslims who had been conquered by jihad wars. Historically Islam conquered huge territories in Africa, Asia, and Europe from the 630s AD until 1683 or so. In these nations, dhimmitude is a status given to non-Muslims and their own formerly sovereign land. The word "dhimmitude" comes from dhimmi, an Arabic word meaning "protected."

Dhimmi was the name applied by the Arab-Muslim conquerors to indigenous non-Muslim populations who surrendered by a treaty (dhimma). Dhimmitude is an extension of the ideology of jihad.

The dhimmis - the conquered people who remain Christian or Jewish - have a protected status under Islamic law. Yet, they also are targets of mass discrimination. In Iran, for example, dhimmis may have to change the names of their children to Islamic names in order for them to be able to attend school. Their local religious leadership may be persecuted or deliberately eliminated to inhibit their practice of their "protected" religion. In addition, strict rules concerning public conduct have been imposed on dhimmis in certain communities.

In Turkey, religious freedom does not exist according the definition established by the United States or the international community. Due to their policy of secularism, religious freedom walks on a tightrope. Secularism is practiced not as a way to insure that religious groups do not exploit or abuse religion or religious feelings for personal or political influence, but it is mechanism for state control over religion and the practices and rights of religious groups.

In conclusion, our parents, our schools, our doctors, and our laws must protect our most vulnerable residents and citizens. Until other faiths, especially the Islamic community, observe the basic rights and freedoms of all people regardless of their race, color, gender and religion to enjoy constitutional and legal protection, they cannot lay claim to humanitarianism. At the same time we must resist non-productive compromises that endanger our people.