

Scarred by Tradition

Art Against Female Circumcision (Female Genital Mutilation)

Art Against Female Genital Mutilation (ART against FGM – AAFGM)

is a co-operative of the European Parliament in Brussels with the German "Illustrators Organisation e.V." and the Fulda-Mosocho-Project. Supporters announced the project in France and include the group "On a marché sur la Bulle" (organiser of the Comic Salon Amiens, among other events, and represented here by Aymeric Nercisse) and Soline Scutella, who at project begin was working for "16000 images", Association des professionnels de l' image, Angoulême. The international Equipe of free-lance artists with members from Europe, the USA and New Zealand also took part, sending a signed statement demanding an end to female circumcision. The AAFGM organisation team currently includes:

Nils Oskamp – Illustratoren Organisation e.V., Hamburg

Marian Meinhardt-Schönfeld – Illustratoren Organisation e.V., Hamburg

Nataly Brombach – LexxHexx, die Texte-Hexe, Düsseldorf

Claudia Wegener – Fulda-Mosocho-Project, Fulda and Mosocho Market

Initiation and Intention

of the project is the creative struggle against female circumcision with the support of established organisations like the Fulda-Mosocho-Project. Since 2002 they have been engaged working against female circumcision, also known as female genital mutilation or FGM, in Kenya. Working together with the support of the people in the area, the project's initiator, Professor Dr. Muthgard Hinkelmann-Toewe and her team have raised awareness and brought about a rethinking of this issue. This has, among other things, also led to a marked decrease of the practice. Convinced about the rightness of the project, which worldwide is among the most successful of its kind, the EU parliamentarian Alexander Alvaro (Germany, FDP) nominated the Fulda-Mosocho-Project to be among the contenders for the Sacharov Prize. This nomination in turn has motivated Alvaro and the illustrator Nils Oskamp to invite artists to join an initiative to publish their works on the topic of female genital mutilation in an anthology. These images and anthology are part of the larger artistic project "ART Against FGM".

It began with an appeal in several languages sent out through the Internet presence of many European illustrator associations throughout all of Europe, and has even reached points further abroad. In the first weeks they received a huge amount of feedback in the

form of submitted works. Many men also feel concerned about the topic and have also submitted works. Another incentive was certainly the way in which this hitherto singular action combines both cultural and humanitarian aspects.

At the closing of submission on August 24, 2006 AAFGM had received more than 150 works from over 100 artists from Germany, France, Austria, Spain, Switzerland, the USA and New Zealand. The choice of images for the 32-page invitational anthology took place in accord with the Fulda-Mosocho-Project. Thanks to the support of the printer Holtkamp in Lünen, Germany, 1,000 high-gloss copies of the anthology "Women's Art Protest Against Female Genital Mutilation" were printed. The Düsseldorf software developers "Hexerei" put together a new website for the Fulda-Mosocho-Project, while the Internet agency "Station.ch" created a virtual picture gallery for AAFGM, where all the submitted works can be viewed. Such images are being provided, free-of-charge, to not only the Fulda-Mosocho-Project but to other interested parties and organisations working against FGM. Also planned, after the decision about this year's recipient of the Sacharov Prize, is the publication of these illustrations and comics in a larger anthology. The original works will be shown in a travelling exhibition, in this way drawing attention to the horrendous practice of FGM. This exhibition will also include works by the Kisii people showing the cultural changes going on brought about by their work with the Fulda-Mosocho-Project. The repercussions of FGM are not only felt in Africa, they also have effects on countries where immigration is taking place. In Germany, for example, there is no obligation for doctors to report cases of FGM they come across. Gynaecologists and social workers, for instance, are not currently equipped with workable perspectives to properly deal with this issue when they come across it. Above and beyond this, the anthology and the travelling exhibition will also solicit and generate donations for support of the Fulda-Mosocho-Project and other anti-FGM organisations.

Professor Dr. Hinkelmann-Toewe has been deeply touched by this project and the possibilities that it opens. In her letter of thanks to the artists she wrote, "Your special artistic engagement, my dear friends, is being met with a special engagement successfully put an end to this practice, hand in hand with those directly affected by this terrible tradition of female genital mutilation. The idea of Mr. Alvaro and Mr. Oskamp to combine these two aspects is a way to further this aim. This is exactly what we want – through the combination of your artistic engagement and that of the Fulda-Mosocho-Project – to successfully reach out to people who are interested in promoting the well-being of thousands, of hundreds of thousands of innocent girls."

Basic Information:

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

is a tradition in 28 African nations, in parts of the Arab peninsula and in Asia. Under the most unworthy and unhygienic conditions, young women's genitals, girls between four and eight years of age, sometimes even baby girls, are mutilated.

The degree of mutilation depends upon the local traditions. In the most extreme cases (the so-called "Pharaonic Circumcision" or infibulation) the labia, parts of the vulva and the clitoris are removed completely before the area is sewn almost totally shut with only a very small opening. According to the WHO, female genital mutilation is "the worst form of gender based violence".

Many girls and women do not survive the procedure, others die shortly thereafter – loss of blood, infections and other complications also exact their toll. Those who do survive must suffer the consequences, which cause the most natural of processes like urination, menstruation or even childbirth to be unspeakable tortures.

Right now, the number of circumcised women around the world is about 175 million; it is estimated that around 6,000 girls and women (according to UNICEF this number is closer to 8,000) are added to the statistics every day. And this is not only occurring in their distant homelands, it is also happening here in the countries of immigration in Europe.

The abomination of this procedure as well as the proximity and actuality of this problematic has motivated many women's groups and human-rights organisations to found international and regional projects. Their main goals are fighting FGM through the communication of knowledge and by developing alternatives. Direct discussions with those most affected are the most important tools of these organisations, one of which is the Fulda-Mosocho-Project.

The Fulda-Mosocho-Project

The Fulda-Mosocho-Project, founded in 2002, is a co-operation between Kisii people in Kenya, the grassroots so to speak, the Centre for PROFS at the University of Applied Sciences, Fulda, as well as the association "Lebendige Kommunikation mit Frauen in ihren Kulturen" (Vivid Communication with Women in their Cultures), also based in Fulda. A three-year programme was initiated on-site in Kenya, where local teachers were trained to be successful multipliers. Seminars for clan elders, church leaders and chiefs followed. Working together in full partnership and on equal footing with the local people, the project was able to reduce the female circumcision rate in the Mosocho region of 98% by 32%. 47 former circumcisers were so convinced that they no longer work as such. More than 4,000 uncircumcised girls were celebrated as full members of the Kisii society in large celebrations. They have been spared the suffering that their mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers were forced to endure. The realisation of their human rights has become reality. Our further goal is to make this possible for more hundreds of girls. You can find out more information on the web under www.fulda-mosocho-project.com or by calling +49 (0) 661 – 65062/Contact: Claudia Wegener.

Dr. Muthgard Hinkelmann-Toewe

Since 1979 a professor at the Fulda University of Applied Sciences in the department of social sciences, with an emphasis on psychosocial counselling, health promotion and for gender sciences. In 1985, moved by the third World Women's Conference in Nairobi, she, students and Kenyan grassroots people founded the research and practice project "Women in Kenya", which since 1992 is part of the Center for PROFS. PROFS is accredited with the UN and looks for innovative ways of bringing developmental aid to help assist in the realisation of human rights.

The European Sacharov Prize for Freedom of Thought

has been awarded yearly by the European Parliament since 1988, given to persons and projects working for human rights and freedom of thought and expression and against oppression and injustice. It is named after the Soviet dissident and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Andrei Sacharov. The prize, endowed with 50,000 Euro, was awarded to Nelson Mandela and played a role in his eventual release from prison. More about it on the Internet under:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/archive/freetext_page_archive/20050818FTX00274-1301/default_de.htm

Alexander Alvaro (FDP), Member of the European Parliament

Alexander Nuno Pickart Alvaro (31) is spokesperson for the ALDE faction, representing civic freedoms, internal affairs and justice in the European Parliament and chairman of the "Campaign for Parliament Reform". Since May 2003, Alvaro is a member of the board of directors of Germany's national political party FDP. The studied banker and lawyer with German and Portuguese citizenship grew up in Australia and Germany. From 2000 to 2005 he was a member of the national board of the "Young Liberals" (JuLis, FDP), most recently as acting national chairman. He additionally is involved with Amnesty International, the German Animal Protection Association and the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations. Find out more about Alexander Alvaro under www.alexander-alvaro.de, press contact: Martina Rozok, Tel: +49 (0)30 4004468-1

Nils Oskamp, Comic Artist & Illustrator, Illustratoren Organisation e.V.

Born in Bochum in 1969, co-founder of the Illustrators Organisation e.V. Diploma for Illustration and Graphic Design. Lecturer at the Animation School Hamburg, as well as the Art Academy Leonardo, Hamburg. Received the Hamburg Animation Award in 2003. Initiator of the German Illustrator's Newsletter. Published in the comic "Déjà Vu", published for the 20-year anniversary of the German-French Comic Artists Seminar. He lives in Hamburg. More under www.oskamp.de

**Marian Meinhardt-Schönfeld, Comic Artist & Illustrator,
Illustratoren Organisation e.V.**

Born in 1970. Studied art in Dresden. One of the first rappers in East Germany (Three M-Men). Graphic artists for the "Déjà Vu" book and art director for Karstadt for years. At the start of the 1990s was cartoonist for the "Dresdner Neuste Nachrichten" and "Sächsische Zeitung". Works as illustrator and comic artist in Dresden. More under www.mamei.com

Illustratoren Organisation e.V.

German professional association of illustrators from the areas of publishing, advertising, film and art. It represents the professional interests of illustrators and works for the promotion of the art of illustration. Founded in 2002, it has 350 members in German-speaking countries. The free newsletter of the organisation has more than 1,000 subscribers around the world. More under www.io-home.de

Nataly Brombach, Free-lance Copywriter & Author

Born in 1971, in 1996 after her intermediate exams in English studies she switched to copywriting for advertising. Living in Düsseldorf since 2003, she offers her writing services under the name "LexxHexx – Die Texte-Hexe". While her main area is still advertising texts, she is working on getting more children's books published. More under www.LexxHexx.com