

PROFS

University of Applied Sciences
Fulda / Germany

Prof. Dr. Muthgard Hinkelmann-Toewe

Fulda, 15.9.06

Prof. Dr. Elisabeth de Sotelo,
Chairperson of the DAB
German Federation of University Women
E-mail: sotelo@uni-koblenz.de

German professor nominated for human rights award

Madam Chairperson,

We are pleased to be able to inform you that your colleague,

Prof. Dr. Muthgard Hinkelmann-Toewe and her project, *the Fulda-Mosocho Project* have been nominated by the European Parliament for this year's Sakharov Prize. Every year, this prize honours special achievements all over the world related to the upholding of human rights.

Prof. Hinkelmann-Toewe is the first case of a woman from Germany entering the nomination process. We would be pleased if you could let all members of the DAB know about this special news on the distribution list.

Ms Hinkelmann-Toewe can imagine reporting on her project in one of the next issues of KONSENS. This nomination is a sign of encouragement and appreciation for the work of all those who are active for the integrity of the female body, on the level of European politics.

Further information can be found on the homepages: www.fulda-mosocho-project.com and www.weibliche-aenitalverstuemmeluna-ueberwinden.com.

You can contact the Fulda-Mosocho Project directly on +49(0)661 65062.

Yours sincerely,
U. Maschke

REPLY:

Dear Ms Hinkelmann-Toewe,

In the name of the German Federation of University Women I would like to send my heartfelt congratulations on your nomination for the Sakharov Prize.

Prof. Dr. Elisabeth de Sotelo
National Chairperson

International honour for German project

Ulrike Maschke, Center for PROFS¹

Since 1988 the European Parliament has annually awarded the Sakharov Prize for special achievements related to freedom of thought and the defence of human rights. For the first time in its history, a German scientist, Prof. Dr. Muthgard Hinkelmann-Toewe from Göttingen, has been nominated, with one of her projects, the German-Kenyan Fulda-Mosocho Project.

Since 2002 the project has been successfully working in Kenya to overcome the terrible tradition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). With a reduction of more than one third in the circumcision rate, the Fulda-Mosocho Project is one

of the most successful projects against FGM worldwide.

EU parliamentarian Alexander Alvaro is convinced that the project has achieved something unique, sustainable and which can be applied to other regions; he has successfully proposed the Fulda-Mosocho Project for nomination for the Sakharov Prize.

With this act, European parliamentarians have set an important political example in a domain where in Africa alone, three million violations of human rights take place every year in the form of mutilation of the female body.

The Fulda-Mosocho Project: „Overcoming Female Genital Mutilation“

Prof. Dr. Muthgard Hinkelmann-Toewe

At the 4th World Women's Conference (Beijing 1995) with the Platform for Action, the African continent committed to reduce considerably the terrible tradition of Female Genital Mutilation within 10 years.

In the years that followed, state bans were introduced in some African countries – including Kenya – and a whole range of actions set off the ground with Western support. Nonetheless, the results were such that in 2004 the Kenyan government felt obliged to host the first International Conference „Stop FGM“ on African soil, aimed at finding out how the basic conditions, urgently required to stop FGM, could be created in the Communities.

At this conference, which I was invited to by the Kenyan government to hold a key note speech, international experts first became aware of the Fulda-Mosocho Project², represented there by team members and 45 grassroots people from

the Kisii ethnic community. In other words, people among those who are benefiting from the project (beneficiaries as they are called officially) had travelled from the Mosocho region, 500 km away, to tell the conference participants from 27 African countries how, by implementing the innovative approach developed by the Center for PROFS since 2002, a social environment had been created enabling them to let go of their ancient tradition with conviction, and work with commitment, joy and success on their new custom they called „A New Growth in our Kisii Culture“.

The project stand in the foyer of the international Kenyatta Conference Centre was constantly surrounded by people. The guest book, with well over 100 entries, reflects the variety of impressed and interested guests.

The conference participants listened attentively to the experiences of the Senior Chief, the Clan Elders, the former





circumcisors, the church representatives, the social workers and the teachers, just as they did to the mothers, fathers and schoolchildren who, along with thousands more grassroots people of the Mosocho region, were part of a movement created in only three years' project work, and who were able to achieve a cultural change among their own people which has lasted until today.

A few short weeks after this conference, all seven locations in the Mosocho region celebrated this new cultural growth for the first time at large public events. In a happy, lively way the Kisii community acknowledged and appreciated the courageous decision of more than 1,000 parents to leave their daughters the way God created them. The girls were presented with certificates by high dignitaries declaring them „Omoisekes“, i.e. full members of the Kisii community and later also marriageable.

In Kenya, the Kisii are the ethnic which, according to the Health Survey by the Kenyan government, held on to their tradition the most strongly until now. At the start of the project, 98% of women were circumcised. Female Genital Mutilation is one of the

worst methods of making women aware of how unworthy they are. It is usually performed on females aged between 4 and 14 without any kind of anaesthesia, carried out with a nail that has been hammered flat, mostly at the break of dawn, as it is by the Kisii, on one day in December. The whole mesh of relationships between the genders is marked by this ancient custom. In most African countries, this tradition is older than the religions now practised there, which is why even church leaders used to be fighting a losing battle in Mosocho, even leaders of Christian churches. „We simply didn't have the necessary knowledge until now“, said church representatives at the seminars run by the Fulda-Mosocho Project.

Gaining access to this knowledge allows these people to give up their previous behaviour with dignity and makes them feel comfortable about choosing to act differently. And this is the heart of the Fulda-Mosocho Project work.

Just as in the fields of economics, technology and medicine, it requires knowledge to be made available, even in the interpersonal fields of reproduction and sexuality which are at the root of FGM issues. This is precisely what grassroots people from Mosocho asked for when

they approached the „Women in Kenya“ women's research and practice project with their problem. Since 1985³ this project has been organising innovative development work with the Luos on issues related to promoting women supporting good health, healthy family planning and the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

The central pillar of the work by the Fulda-Mosocho Project, which was developed hand in hand with the Kisii, is the three year psycho-social further education programme for teachers, which all 70 schools in the region registered for. In the training phases (three a year) fundamental knowledge about the male and female anatomies and the lifelong effects of circumcision is taught – but in the first place the structures which allow this custom to exist are worked out. Another decisive point is the training atmosphere, designed to make room for individual comments, incentives, questions and feelings, and for creativity.

FGM, like all problems in the fields of sexuality and reproduction, first requires taboos to be eradicated by making available appropriate knowledge. This allows communication to take place in a manner which is a matter of course in other fields: well-informed, responsibly and in objective, pleasant language. Peter, a teacher at Nvamondo Primary School, says: „In my lessons I use words which I wouldn't have mentioned outside a bedroom before. Now we talk about everything with no taboos; that is what makes this approach so unique and effective. We are very thankful to the Germans for showing us this way.“⁴

The teachers trained in this way (50% men and 50% women) have been turned into convincing multipliers who have got through to all levels of the population. After only a few weeks they made the decision to protect their own daughters from mutilation: after this they





Prof. Dr. Muthaard Hinkelmann-Toewe

struggled with relatives in their families, in close cooperation with other participants on the course, until their efforts were crowned with success. Then they got to work in their schools: convinced their colleagues, their pupils and the pupils' parents. Encouraged by these steps they went to local council meetings and fought to get FGM on the agenda and to be allowed to speak ... With their innovative knowledge they aroused such great interest that the chiefs and clan el-

ders turned directly to the project team to have workshops provided specially for them: since then, about 75 have been carried out.

On hearing of the education programme planned for three years, many experts on development aid predicted that it would end after one year at the latest due to a drop in the number of participants – but things turned out differently. There was no sign of a drop in participants: after the second trimester, the course participants even decided to organise an „Open Day“. They felt the urge to make public what they had already learned and what they had worked out with their classes as a result. A colourful mosaic of the spoken word, images, song, theatre and dance: ancient songs were given new words – texts for the preservation of the clitoris – were presented to the guests. In chorus, those in charge, i.e. parents, grandparents, courageously were chiefs and clans, were entreated to stop the terrible tradition.

„Open Days“ were also organised in 2004 and 2005, and in April 2005, shortly before the end of the third year, the course participants came up with the unexpected wish to prove their ability with a final examination.

What a task! The project was so well aligned with all levels of administration (from local to district and government level) that all formal/organisational hurdles regarding its contents were overcome: the course was officially categorised as a teacher training programme by the District Education Officer (DEO) in charge. In line with their wishes, the participants took both a written and an oral examination.

At a ceremony, the DEO presented them with the final certificates, which bore the Kenyan coat of arms and my signature, as well as those of the Departments responsible (Education & Health).

The cornerstone of what has been achieved is that all social groups have been convinced to overcome the terrible tradition thanks to the innovative education work. At the large public events held in December, the month of circumcision, at all seven locations in the region, thousands come together to take on the girls who have been saved as full members of the Kisii community and to celebrate together the cultural change which is taking place. This is how it was in 2004 and 2005 – so far more than 4,000 girls have been saved – and this is how it will be in 2006. Preparations have already begun at the separate locations.

Chiefs from neighbouring regions have used these large events to publicise the fact that the approach followed with such great success in Mosochi is also coming to their region, so centuries-old cultural constraints can be lifted there too. People have experienced that the Fulda approach means a dialogue, bringing people a new quality of social togetherness. In Mosochi a „real cultural revolution“ has been set off, according to the ARD correspondent for Africa, Dr. Zeppenfeld, in his report on the project.

Prospects. In Mosochi, as part of the project, teachers are currently in the process of adapting the contents of the course into compulsory curricula for all school systems/school types, in cooperation with the school authorities.

As another part of the project, the clan elders of the Mosochi Division, of whom



Lebendige Kommunikation mit Frauen
in ihren Kulturen (VividCom)
Donation account: Sparkasse Göttingen,
account no.: 138 107,
bank code no.: 260 500 01
Mark donations: Fulda-Mosocho-Projekt
www.fulda-mosocho-proiect.com

- 1) Founded in 1992 by Prof. Dr. Muthaard Hinkelmann-Toewe at the University of Applied Sciences, Fulda, accredited by the UNO, develops innovative approaches to solving global problems, offers training in this and accompanies its implementation in practice.
- 2) The Fulda-Mosocho Project is carried out on location in cooperation with the NGOs „VividCom“ (Fulda) and „Enka Envira“ (Mosocho).
- 3) The origins of this cooperation go back to the third World Conference on Women (WCW), which was held in Nairobi in 1985: a teacher from Luoland invited us to go home with her after the conference to an area without civilisation and be a guest in her home – 500 km west of Nairobi.
- 4) Dr. Zeppenfeld's team from German TV station ARD visited the project in Dec.'05 for a week. The report „A Stop to Mutilation“ was broadcast on the Weltspiegel programme on Sunday 5.2.06 and can be watched on the link www.weltspiegel.de under „Themen / Sendung vom 05.02.2006“.
- 5) Women's interest in watching our work on location and the enquiries we received on this subject led us to found the project „As Friends to Kenya“. More information: tel. +49 (0)661 64125, homepage: www.mit-reiseprojekt-kenia.de. As part of this project, trips specially designed for female pensioners can be organised.
- 6) ... organised in the „Illustratoren Organisation e.V.“

there are more than 240, are currently compiling records of girls born from 2001, in their clans they are going from family to family so that they know, they and their daughters are being taken on lovingly and safely into the new culture. „In Mosocho, in two or three years this crime against girl children will belong entirely to the past“, said the Senior Chief.

In neighbouring divisions and districts, with enough financial support, the Fulda approach would be able to stop the suffering of all the girls living there within four or five years.

These prospects speak for themselves. For anyone who wants to invest in improving girls' and women's futures, this is the right place to come.⁵

Mobile exhibition. To support the nomination of the Fulda-Mosocho Project, artists⁶ from all over the world have expressed their dismay about FGM in pictures which get under the skin. A selection has been put together in a book and provided to the European Parliament. Along with these artists, the Fulda Mosocho Project is planning a mobile exhibition which will be displayed in several European towns and will be made up of two parts: first, the suffering and pain caused by FGM, and secondly, the happiness and commitment the Kisii in Mosocho have experienced in overcoming it thanks to the Fulda-Mosocho Project. The Lord Mayor of Fulda has declared that he will set the exhibition off on its way from Fulda (second half of 2007).

Prof. Dr. Muthaard Hinkelmann-Toewe, a member of the German Federation of University Women (DAB) in Göttingen for more than 20 years, has taught Psycho-social Consultancy/Health Promotion and Gender Science at the University of Applied Sciences in Fulda since 1979. P.O.Box 2318, 36013 Fulda, Tel./Fax: +44 (0)551 – 792523, www.center-for-profs@web.de

