

POLITICAL STATEMENTS

Statement regarding the Debate on the Practice of Circumcising Infant Boys

1. The Jewish ritual circumcision, Brit-Mila, is an essential and indispensable element of the Jewish religion. It is performed on the eighth day after a Jewish boy's birth, except if delayed for health reasons. For the child, a correctly performed circumcision is innocuous, and there has thus far been scant evidence of any psychological trauma.
2. For thousands of years, male circumcision has never been questioned, except by these systems which hoped to force Jews into assimilation and to abandon their religion by suppressing this vital Jewish custom.
3. Brit Mila is incomparable to female genital mutilation, both in physical and psychological respect. It does not affect the functioning of the organ, nor does it have an adverse effect on sensation. Both the Swiss National Council and the Council of States have, in accordance with the Federal Council, recognized this fact. Hence, based on a specific debate in parliament on the parliamentary initiative on the ban of sexual mutilation they did forgo explicitly criminal liability for the male circumcision. The new paragraph in the criminal code was adopted unanimously by the Council of States and by the National Council with a single member voting against it.
4. Religious freedom does not always supersede other rights. As all other constitutionally guaranteed rights, it may be limited under conditions set out in the Federal Constitution. However, taking into account the minimal effect of this surgical intervention on boys' physical integrity, a limitation or even criminal prosecution of properly carried out circumcisions would represent a massive and disproportionate violation of the freedom of religious practice as part of our constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion and conscience. Freedom of religion and conscience is not only the freedom to avow but also to practice a religion. Furthermore, any legal curtailing of circumcision would be regarded as one-sided, since similar practices like, for example, cosmetic surgeries, having possibly also the potential to improve socio-cultural acceptance, are unchallenged.
5. The child's right of freely choosing its religion is not limited by ritual circumcision. A boy is Jewish by birth and does not become Jewish by circumcision. Meanwhile, Jews, males and females, do occasionally convert to other religions. We take the opportunity to remind that the right of religious education of one's own children is a fundamental human right.
6. The medical risks associated with circumcision are particularly small for infants. A postponement of circumcision to adulthood carries significantly increased potential health risks.
7. It should be pointed out that globally 30% of all males are circumcised, and that studies of the WHO recognize male circumcision as an effective way to combat the transmission of HIV and other diseases. While female circumcision has never had a medical indication, the removal of the male foreskin is common and regularly performed for medical reasons without side effects.

Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities, Platform for Liberal Jews in Switzerland, 20 July 2012

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