

# "A courageous decision"

The Fulda Project in Kenya is saving girls from this painful practice.

By Antja Carina Schumacher

**KASSEL/FULDA.** The United Nations are calling for zero tolerance for female genital mutilation. In Fulda, in the German state of Hessen, there is the project "Overcoming Female Genital Circumcision" which is working against "female circumcision" especially with the Kisii ethnic community in the Mosocho region of Kenya. We spoke with Prof. Dr. Muthgard Hinkelmann-Toewe, the initiator and head of this project.

Which are the countries where female circumcision is practiced ?

**Prof. Dr. Muthgard Hinkelmann-Toewe:** In most countries of Africa and in some Arab countries. In Africa, three million girls suffer circumcision every year. The age of the girls being circumcised is constantly becoming lower - girls as young as five years are now being circumcised.

Why is circumcision practised?

**Hinkelmann-Toewe:** Because that is the way men want it. It is a centuries old tradition of the Kisii ethnic community in Kenya, with whom we are working together. Female circumcision is the worst form of discrimination - a way of showing them their lack of value by cutting up their bodies.

What happens to women who are not circumcised?

**Hinkelmann-Toewe:** The men have made it a rule that they will marry no woman who still has a



Picture legend: HNA archive; Photo: AFP. photo is not from Fulda-Mosocho-Project.

clitoris. The women have no chance locally since otherwise they will be ostracised by the community.

But isn't female circumcision already illegal?

**Hinkelmann-Toewe:** The UN Conference on Population and Development of 1994 had this issue on its agenda. The Conference achieved a worldwide consensus to abolish this custom in Africa within about ten years. This has not yet been achieved.

How are the young girls circumcised?

**Hinkelmann-Toewe:** This differs from community to community and region to region. The children are brought by their mothers to the circumcisors. With the Kisii, it is performed with a knife made from a nail.

How long does it take for the physical wounds to heal?

**Hinkelmann-Toewe:** It takes months. But one cannot speak of a proper healing

What do you actually do?

**Hinkelmann-Toewe:** We work with people from all classes of society - not for them. Our project is called "Overcoming Female Genital Circumcision". We are not raising a monitory finger to prohibit something. The title shows confidence that the people will achieve the goal that they have set themselves.

Are you successful?

**Hinkelmann-Toewe:** The project is sustainably successful. The Kisii are already in the process of changing their culture, and celebrate the abolition of the tradition by holding major public events. There, girls who are not circumcised are honoured together with their parents and grandparents.

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## Particulars

**PROF. Dr. MUTHGARD HINKELMANN-TOEWE** (65) teaches at the University of Applied Sciences, Fulda (subjects:

psychosocial counselling / health promotion, gender science). Originally from Göttingen, she is

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