

Interview

“This movement will not be stopped”

BERLIN. (hpd) Last week, there was a press conference in Berlin. The German organization *Kinderhilfe* had invited representatives from several organizations against circumcision. *hpd* was able to interview one of them, Eran Sadeh, lawyer and founder of *Protect the Child*, Israel.

hpd: You [told us a little bit](#) about the Israeli movement and how you came to be against circumcision. You said that about 97 per cent still have their sons circumcised?

Eran Sadeh: There is no official statistics about the number of people who circumcise and the number of people who do not circumcise. However, the norm in Israel is to circumcise, no question about it. Yet, the number of people who become aware of the harm and the injury, the complications and the pain, the legal aspects and the ethical aspects – they are growing all the time. The movement to end circumcision is global and many organizations in the world, including Jewish organizations, promote the information and the need to transform this practice from a physical to a spiritual one. As long as you don't know anything about circumcision, everything is okay. They say, ignorance is a bliss. But once people are educated it is much more difficult to go ahead and circumcise. Unfortunately, often people tell me, “I don't want to know!” If official agencies, like the government, like health organizations, will provide information, people will know and won't be able to escape the information, they won't be able to say, “Oh, you're not objective, you're extremist”, or anything like that. So I want the official viewpoint of the government to be very clear about it. That this practice is harmful, painful, risky, unethical and immoral. If there will be an official statement of this nature, people won't be able to escape the information and say, “I don't know, I don't want to know.”

hpd: And do you cooperate with the government or with officials?

Eran Sadeh: I try to approach them, with no luck so far. But it's an ongoing process. I will continue it until I find the courageous person or body who will take the stance against circumcision in Israel. So far, I haven't got any positive response, because organizations in Israel who protect human rights and children's human rights, they have religious figures that serve in their boards and they don't want to mess with it, because they know it's a sensitive issue. And nothing is being done at the moment at the official level. I will continue to approach health officials and legal experts, and I fully believe that it is only a matter of time until the social norm will be reversed. So people who are still practicing circumcision will feel the social pressure because they are doing the wrong thing, the immoral thing, they will be under pressure not to do it – this is my aspiration, this is my goal, to reach the point where the social norm is reversed.

hpd: Are there any politicians at your side? Or political parties?

Sadeh: No. Politicians and parties are not interested in voicing their opinion about this. The major problem here is that the children and babies do not vote. The political parties and political figures don't get any credit from babies and children for protecting them. So they don't have enough motivation to go out against this practice. But I am a baby who grew up, and I can speak for myself, and I can say that I was hurt, and many like me are the same. The more voices are heard like myself, the more they will not be able to ignore us and say, "This is not happening". This is happening and 200 babies are being circumcised every day in Israel, it is a lot. Tens of thousands of babies every year. This cannot be, it cannot go on like this, like it never happened. It is happening and it must be stopped. Through education, through information.

hpd: Are there other organizations like your own in Israel?

Sadeh: There is an organization called Ben Shalem, which means intact boy. This organization filed a petition to the High Court of Justice in Israel 12 or 13 years ago and it was dismissed. It contained all the arguments for the right of the child, but the court did not even address the arguments, just dismissed the petition flat, outright. I think that the Israeli public should be ready for this kind of legal action before it is filed. I think that work still needs to be done to change the view of the public about this issue. I don't mean 100 per cent, I think once you get to a point where 20 per cent, 30 per cent are against circumcision, it will be a good time to act legally and address the court again against this practice.

hpd: Do you cooperate with organizations in other countries, such as in the US or Great Britain?

Sadeh: I do have connections through e-mails and the internet, [facebook](#), about this. Not long ago, the AAP, the American Academy of Pediatrics published a viewpoint, which was outrageous and ignored the fact that the foreskin is a healthy body part that is being amputated. They had no consideration for the human rights of the child, the ethical problems, no consideration at all. This statement by the AAP served as binding cement for the whole movement against this stance. When the statement was published, thousands of people formed a group to protest online. We photographed our hands with "AAP" on the one palm and "No Ethics" on the other palm, we uploaded thousands of those pictures, and made it into an [internet movie](#) as a protest against the statement by the AAP. So, all over the world, it's not only the United States, also in Israel and every country where circumcision is practiced, there are people who are getting together to act against it. This movement will not be stopped.

hpd: What's your estimation of the current situation in Germany?

Sadeh: I do hope that the petition by the *Kinderhilfe* will be accepted to postpone any legislation. Because any legislation that permits circumcision, whether by doctors or mohels, is contradictory to the constitution. The constitution protects the human rights of the child to bodily integrity and to have equal protection by the law. You cannot protect Christian children or girls and not protect Jewish children or Muslim children.

As a country, you have a legal and ethical and moral obligation to protect all the children just the same. And if you do not protect Jewish children and Muslim children, you act against the constitution. So it will be unconstitutional by the *Bundestag*, if a law such as this one is passed. So I do firmly believe that legislation in this spirit, to allow for circumcision, should be postponed until a point where a legal and a medical and a public debate has been well performed, and every effect is known. What the Cologne judge said was simple logic: Freedom of religion does not give parents permission to inflict injury or cause pain or to put their children at risk. Freedom of religion is a right, but it is not an absolute right. Once you use your freedom of religion to hurt someone else, this is where you should be stopped.

hpd: [Pro-Kinderrechte](#) in Germany says, children also have a freedom of religion.

Sadeh: Exactly, once you stamp the boy just like you stamp a cow, and say, he is Jewish, he is Muslim, and you take a piece of his body to stamp him, you prevent him from growing up to be what kind of a person *he* would like to be. I am now Jewish and an Israeli, but I do not believe in God, and I do not believe that my body should have been violated, and a piece of my penis was to be amputated. No one asked me. No one asked me then, and I cannot reverse it. This is the point, this is my body, this should be my choice whether to circumcise my penis or not. It is my body, and should be left to me and to me only.

hpd: Do you think that Germany is being watched by Israel right now?

Sadeh: I certainly hope that this [press conference](#) will be covered by the media in Israel.

hpd: If the law is passed or if the law is not passed, there is going to be a discussion here in Germany, what do you think is going to happen in Israel?

Sadeh: I came here, so people in Israel as well will hear the other side. People in Israel hear only one side. Even Shimon Perez who is a humanist and a scholar and a very wise man, even he emphasizes only the freedom of religion as a right of the Jews in his statements. Even he did not mention the conflict between the freedom of religion and the rights of the child. So I came here to let this voice be heard as well. There is a conflict. You cannot say freedom of religion and just ignore that there is another part to the equation. I do want people in Israel to hear this and to be aware of this conflict. Because people only hear that Germany wants to interfere with Jewish right. But you have to read the ruling by the Cologne judge and understand the argument. You cannot ignore the argument as if it was not there. As though someone crazy had said: "Ah! I want to interfere with Jewish life in Germany!" It's not like that at all.

hpd: Yes, it's about children's rights. – Is there anything you would like to say?

Sadeh: I think the bottom line is: It's my body, it should be my choice. That's it: My body, my choice.

hpd: Thank you very much!

The interview was conducted by Fiona Lorenz