

Secular Medical Forum
25 Red Lion Square
London WC1R 4RL
Registered company no. 7237231
Website: <http://www.secularmedicalforum.org.uk>
Tel: +44 7967 837041

Chancellor Angela Merkel
German Bundestag
Platz der Republik 1
11011 Berlin
Germany

14th July 2012

Dear Chancellor Merkel,

I am writing as chair of the Secular Medical Forum, based in the United Kingdom, which campaigns to protect people from the harmful imposition of other people's beliefs.

We urge you to join us in offering our unreserved support for the recent Cologne district court ruling outlawing non-therapeutic infant male circumcision. Despite calls for condemnation of the ruling, especially from Jewish and Muslim organisations, we, and the Royal Dutch Medical Association believe the practice to be potentially harmful. More importantly, this ruling correctly places the welfare of vulnerable children above the unrestrained expression of adult beliefs. This accords with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights whose Article 18(3) limits "Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs" in order to protect "the fundamental rights and freedoms of others".

We understand, and have some sympathy with, the sensitivities of certain religious groups which may feel threatened or even attacked by the judgment. Some Jews and Muslims have undoubtedly suffered discrimination and persecution both in Germany and elsewhere. But it is important to be clear that this judgment is not religious persecution. On the contrary, this judgment extends freedom of religion, freedom of belief and freedom from bodily harm to children, as it should.

As the leader of a democracy that supports child welfare, we urge you to resist the strong pressure being brought to bear to overturn this laudable decision. The judgment is a common-sense verdict reflecting the expansion of human rights in the 21st century and the necessary restrictions that organised groups must have on their rights to practise their beliefs.

The lesson from the 20th century is not that groups of stronger people should be able to surgically impose their views on groups of weaker people to satisfy their own ideology or theology, but that all people deserve society's protection from cradle to grave. That the first ruling of this kind in Europe should happen in Germany is something of which you can justly be proud. It recognises the rights of the individual, especially a vulnerable one, unable to express his own will, even when faced with enormous pressure from religious bodies. We have been seeking for several years to move the UK in this direction.

As you know, the decision of the district court is that non-therapeutic cutting of a child's body is an assault; all children should be protected from serious non-accidental injury. We agree that the child was unable to give informed consent and that surrogate parental consent is not valid for an operation with no clinical indication and with the potential to cause serious harm. We agree with the judgment where it differs from the views of

religious adults who think that children might be harmed by denying them this forced operation. In fact, these children are being protected from having forced irreversible surgery to their most intimate body parts without their consent. As consenting adults they could later freely choose the operation once they are capable of doing so if they so choose.

In case it might be helpful, we would like to direct you to the 2010 statement of the Royal Dutch Medical Association (<http://knmg.artsenet.nl/Publicaties/KNMGpublicatie/Nontherapeutic-circumcision-of-male-minors-2010.htm>) produced along with seven other Dutch scientific associations including the GPs, paediatric surgeons, paediatricians and urologists. Their conclusion was that the procedure can be harmful and that it violates the boy's human rights to autonomy and physical integrity; a position mirrored by the German court ruling.

We are shocked that religious groups deny the harms and at the distorted and disingenuous claims made by those opposing the court's decision, wrongly suggesting that it is an indication of anti-Semitism. We urge you not to let such emotional blackmail persuade you to change the law or criticise the court's decision. As it stands, the court's decision ensures that today's children will be free to grow up to make their own decisions; any reversal would be to take that basic right away from them.

Please join us in supporting children's rights not to have unnecessary, potentially harmful surgery forced upon them.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Antony Lempert MBBS MRCP

Chair

Secular Medical Forum