

Media Democracy Online



Maria Miccio, Martha Allen, Sara Sepehrrad

Donna Allen, Ph.D,
Founder

Martha Allen, Ph.D,
President and Director

Dana Densmore, Vice-
President

Paula Kassell, Vice-
President

Sara Sepehrrad, Staff

Maria Miccio, Staff

Inside:

- 1-2 FGM: Female Genital Mutilation
- 3 Breast Ironing
- 4 Stoning in Iran
- 5 Women in Haiti

This issue's focus:

Women's Human Rights: A Matter of Life and Death



Strides being made against Female Genital Mutilation

By Maria Miccio, WIFFP

For many of us, we have no idea what it is like to live in a world where “coming of age” means having your genitals cut and mutilated. But every year, this practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) takes place.

Seventy-five percent of young girls in Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia and the Sudan undergo FGM. In Djibouti and Somalia, those who undergo FGM are at ninety-eight percent.

These percentages are frighteningly high.

In recent years, we have heard more about the many hardships endured by the girls who are victims to FGM. Many of them leave the procedure with permanent scars to their body and their mind.

Why would women in a society want to submit their young girls to a practice that causes pain for a lifetime? It is not because the women don't know any better. These women know that the FGM procedure is incredibly painful. They know

Continued on 2

it might cause physical and psychological damage, or in some cases, even death, due to excessive blood loss or the unsterile knives or razor blades



Examples of a knife and razor blade used during FGM.

used during the procedure.

FGM is enforced due to the patriarchal society that these women live in. FGM is seen as a necessary act. Women know that without performing FGM, their daughters or granddaughters could be seen as impure. Men may never want to marry a woman who has not undergone this procedure for that reason.

Many people have tried to give these young girls and women a voice and choice. Burkina Faso, along with Ghana have passed laws to ensure that FGM is a blamable offense. There have been law cases having to do with deaths due to the FGM procedure. These cases have been taken to court under current criminal laws. Also, in a few societies, people have

chosen to speak out against the custom of FGM. In Senegal, the lessening of the practice is now up to 65%.

In 1994, Australia and Norway, along with Sweden and the United Kingdom, began to pass laws against FGM. Then, in December 1995, Bills went before the United States Congress, as well as, the Canadian Parliament to make FGM a criminal offense. In addition to this great progress made against FGM, the United Nations also supports any laws that ban FGM.

Beginning in February 2008, ten different parts of the UN activated the Interagency Statement. This statement strives to increase the inclusive end to FGM in one generation. The goal is that by 2015, FGM will successfully be terminated in most countries.

Even if it doesn't seem like it, there are numerous strides being made against the heinous act of FGM. There are books written by women personally affected by FGM.

Two noteworthy books include Desert Flower by Waris Dirie and Cathleen Miller and Born in the Big Rains by Fadumo Korn. These books both have personal accounts of what the FGM procedure consists of and tells the harrowing

stories of these women's paths to freedom.

In a previous issue of Media Democracy Online, MaryAnn Mohamoud was a featured writer on FGM. Mohamoud had the procedure done to her at the tender age of 5. In her article she brings light to the subject of FGM through her own story. You can check out the article at wifp.org. Click on Media Democracy Online and then go to the Winter 08-09 issue.

If you would like to work for or find out more about fighting FGM, please visit:

<http://www.fgmnetwork.org/index.php>

<http://www.womenatrisk.oruk/vw3.html>

<http://www.endfgmnow.org/what-can-you-do-to-help/>

Resources used in this article:

-Image found at:

<http://www.middle-east-info.org/gateway/genocide/>

- Fact Sheet: Public Inquiries Unit, Department of Public Info, UN

<http://southasia.oneworld.net>

Another Form of Female Mutilation: Breast Ironing

By Maria Miccio, WIFP

It is amazing that in addition to Female Genital Mutilation there is another practice being used on young girls that is also shocking. The practice is known as “breast ironing” and is practiced in Cameroon as well as other parts of Africa.

Since there are not programs for sexual education, this practice is seen as being necessary for the protection of young girls. A girl can hit puberty as young as age nine and begin to develop breasts. Boys will then see the girl and think that is time to have sex with her, even if she does not consent. This results in unwanted pregnancy or disease, such as HIV.

Mainly mothers are the ones performing breast ironing on their young daughters. While the mothers do this practice out of concern for their daughters, the practice can scar the girls inside and out. Rather than holding boys and men accountable for their acts, worldwide women and girls pay the price.

There are a few different methods to the practice, including massaging hot stones onto the chest, pummeling the chest with the peels of a plantain or even rubbing herbs or kerosene onto the chest.

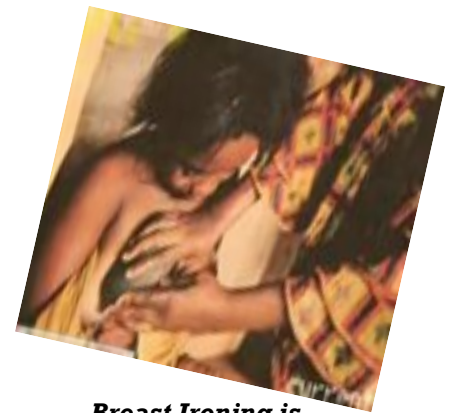
This may be unthinkable to some, but for those living in countries where teen pregnancy rates and disease run high, it is seen as a normal coming-of-age practice and method of birth control for girls.

What about the boys? Their bodies are not mutilated or permanently damaged. They can go on living their normal lives without having to undergo the tragic pain of having their most private parts damaged by someone they love.

The damage and pain doesn't only last a few minutes. It lasts a lifetime. Some consequences of breast ironing are burns, abscesses, deformities or even loss of one or both breasts. This not only physically damages a girl, but can also emotionally and mentally damage her.

This practice is being done to one in four girls, local health advocates say. The mutilation of young girls must end.

There are many ways you can help with the fight against breast ironing, including joining the Facebook group FABIIC (Fight Against Breast Ironing in Cameroon). These young girls don't have a voice, let's give them one.



Breast Ironing is performed on a young girl.

Resources used in this article:

-The Washington Post: March 7, 2010

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/04/AR2010030404489.html>

-Image found at:

<http://www.mamamia.com.au/weblog/tag/teen-pregnancy-in-africa>

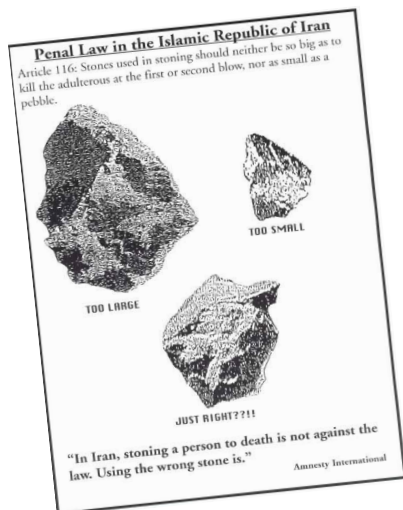
Stoning In Iran: Women Suffer More

By Sara Sepehrrad, WIFP

The stoning of a human being is a cruel act that is being carried out in many Middle Eastern countries. Stoning is a form of execution that is performed by burying someone in the ground and surrounding them with people who throw rocks and stones at the accused person. The rocks vary in size and will shatter a person's skull.

The act of stoning is an execution that is as old as written language, but what is surprising is that it still occurs today. Unfortunately this horrendous crime is being carried out in the name of Allah (God). Not only does it still occur in the Middle East, it is one of the most common types of executions in Iran, especially for women.

Women are stoned in Iran more than men. They are wrapped in a blanket that covers their entire bodies and buried from their head down. If they are able to escape they are still executed for their supposed crime, whereas men are buried from their waist down and if are able to get out, they are pardoned.



“In Iran, stoning a person to death is not against the law. Using the wrong stone is.”

-Amnesty International



Iran has claimed in many accounts that the act of stoning has been abolished but there are records that show otherwise.

Women are mistreated severely in Iran and it is a crime against humanity to stone people. Women already have little control over their lives in the Middle East, its saddening to think they have a disadvantage to men even in the act of stoning.

The international community needs to be aware of the inhumane events that continue to happen to the women in the Middle East, especially in Iran.

For more information, please go to:

<http://www.apostatesofislam.com/media/stoning.htm>

<http://www.iran-e-azad.org/stoning/women.htm>

A moving film that highlights the stoning of a woman in Iran: The Stoning of Soraya M.

Haitian Women: After the Earthquake

By Sara Sepehrrad and Maria Miccio, WIFP

In the repercussion of the devastating earthquake in Haiti, we have come to see the amount of damage that it has done to the Earth and to the Haitian people. All walks of life have been affected permanently. Families have lost mothers, daughters, fathers and brothers. Some still to this day are looking and hoping to find their loved ones in the aftermath.

Although everyone in Haiti and elsewhere in the world has been severely affected by this disaster, a focus needs to be on the Haitian women and children.

Since the catastrophe there has been no shelter, let alone privacy for women. Families are left sleeping on the ground with barely any protection. Children are left hungry and mothers are left scared.

In addition to not having privacy and inadequate food, women have to deal with the issues that surround menstrual cycles and pregnancy.

Anytime a woman needs to use the bathroom, whether it be for feminine reasons or not, they are in danger.

A 21-year-old Haitian woman stated to Michelle Faul from *The Huffington Post*, what happened to her when she went outside into the darkness to use the restroom, "They grabbed me, put their hands over my mouth and then the three of them



took turns...I am so ashamed. We're scared people will find out and shun us." Even in circumstances such as this one, the women are worried not just about themselves, but about family reputation.

Women who are pregnant face additional serious concerns. They not only have to take care of themselves, but also their unborn child.

Out of 3 million people affected by the earthquake, an estimated 63,000 pregnant women need particular attention. According to *Faith and Action*, "The current situation is putting the lives of

thousands of women and their infants at risk from complications related to pregnancy and child birth."

Although this catastrophic event occurred months ago, these women are still feeling the aftershock. They need help and support immediately from outside communities.

To learn more and to help Haitian women visit:

http://www.unicef.org/infoycountry/haiti_contact.html

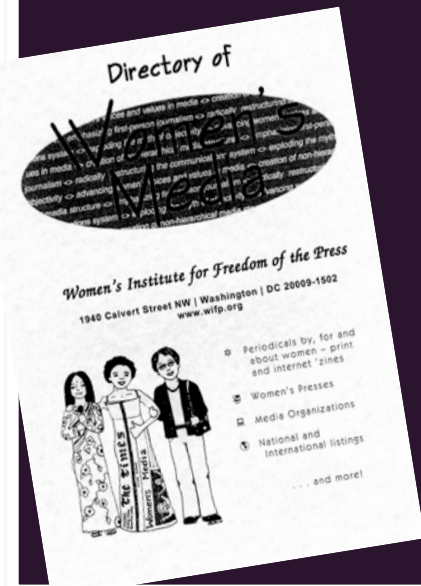
Contributions and Information can go through Madre:

<http://www.madre.org/index.php?video=1>

Image found at:

<http://photos.upi.com/sli/deshow/lbox/8147e572e673ab26da5bf7a26fb9f9ebc/Haiti-Earthquake.jpg>

Directory of Women's Media:



A directory of media owned and operated primarily by, for and about women.

Order your Print Copy Today:

<http://wifp.org/pub%20order.html>

You can also access an online version on the WIFP website:

<http://wifp.org/DWM/DirectoryWomensMedia.html>

Upcoming Media Events

June 11 - 12, 2010 New York, NY USA
No Violence Against Women: Strategic Imperatives for Ending Violence Against Women

July 24 - 27, 2010 Tehran Iran
International Conference on Multiculturalism and Global Community

For more information on these and other media events, go

to: <http://wifp.org/mediaeventsinternational.html>

Help Support Media Democracy: Donate to the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press

Name:

Address:

Phone:

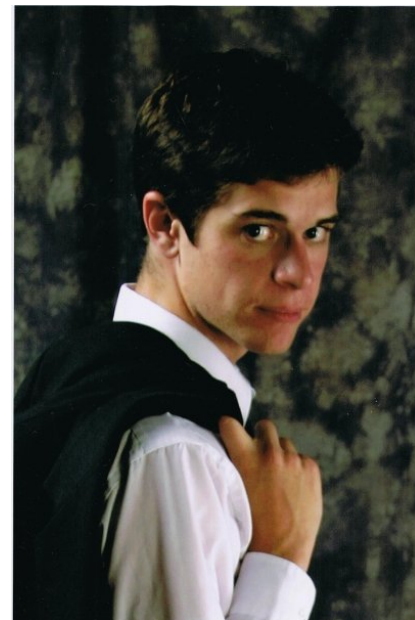
Email:

Yes, I would like to contribute \$ _____ to WIFP

Yes, I would like to become a sustaining supporter (\$15-\$20 a month)

Contributions are tax-deductible. Please make checks payable to WIFP or you can use PayPal. A link to PayPal is available on our homepage:

<http://www.wifp.org>



This issue is dedicated to Christopher Thomas Bales

1988-2010

Our hearts are with WIFP Associate Rebecca Peterson whose dear son, Chris, lost his life this year. We dedicate this issue to Chris, 21 years old, whose positive words about WIFP will reverberate with us as we mourn his loss. Our love to Rebecca and Chris' younger sister, Sara.

