Appendix C: Senate Address

Motion by Senator Sithembile Mlotshwa

Senate of Zimbabwe
17 July 2014
**Why the Need to Ban Child Circumcision**

**Senator Sithembile Mlotshwa**

This Motion is a move to condemn the circumcision of children that is young boys below 18 years of age.

In Zimbabwe, male circumcision increased with the belief it was scientifically proven that it reduces HIV transmission by 60%. We have from time immemorial traditional groups that have been practicing circumcision in different parts of Zimbabwe for cultural benefits and beliefs. Mr. President, may I mention a few benefits: the lowered risk of sexually transmitted diseases, for instance, and penile cancer.

We need a legislation which prohibits infant and child circumcision.

- The United Nations Convention on Rights of a Child, Article 13 part (i) states that the child shall have the right to freedom of expression. Therefore, infant circumcision infringes the child’s freedom to sexual expression by permanently and unnecessarily diminishing his sexual sensation.

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 5 states that no one shall be subject to torture or cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. This is the case when you circumcise children. They have to bear pain and the after-effects of prolonged pain for two to three weeks, depriving them of normal sleep.

- Rights of children in Zimbabwe’s Constitution, Section 81 (d): Every child has the right to family or parental care or to appropriate care when removed from the family environment.

- Section 81 (e) says the child has a right to be protected from economic and sexual exploitation from child labour and from maltreatment, neglect, or any form of abuse.

- Section 81 subsection (ii) says a child's best interests are paramount in every matter concerning the child.

The argument of the implementers is that parents have a right to decide in the best interest of the child using the above section. Mr President, I am trying to think of the best interest of the child in this case when we are trying to scale down HIV and AIDS. Why are we circumcising a one-month old child in trying to scale down HIV and AIDS? Is it in the best interest of the child and does the child know what is happening to his body?

Mr. President, in this case when you look at it closely, what are the immediate benefits for this child when he is circumcised at a tender age? When you circumcise a child because the powers that be decide that the transmission of HIV and AIDS will scale down, is it really for the benefit of this child?

Mr. President, I am afraid we are creating a generation of useless men. Yes, because if one of your limbs is not functioning properly after the mishaps that happen during circumcision, then you will be disabled to a certain extent. Also since these children do not indulge in sexual activities that transmit HIV and AIDS, how does cutting the innocent souls’ foreskins reduce or contribute to the said statistics?

Mark my words colleagues, some of these children’s organs will be for decoration in the body and history will judge us for allowing the policy to continue. By the time these young guys need to test whether their organs are functioning, we will be long dead. Mr. President, we will be long dead to be answerable as to why we allowed this programme to continue. These guys will be there as decorations.

Mr. President, this programme should go back to all circumcised boys since its inception in 2009 and carry out health checks for the damages in each and every individual so that we are satisfied that we have a healthy people growing up. We want to avoid children discovering the malfunctioning on their own organs when it is too late.

Mr. President, I believe parents should be advised on the benefits of an intact boy organ. They should be advised. It is very important to protect it because Zimbabwe's future generations will depend on the functioning of that organ. Mr. President, there is no other source that I know that will secure the production of the next generation other than the organ of this small boy.

If my colleagues know of any other source, they will say so in their debates.

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1 This Motion was delivered in the Zimbabwe Senate on 17 July 2014 and transcribed from the Hansard via [https://www.southerneye.co.zw/2014/07/21/need-ban-child-circumcision](https://www.southerneye.co.zw/2014/07/21/need-ban-child-circumcision) accessed on 14 March 2019. The transcript is not available on the online Hansard, possibly due to sensitivities to international donors and funding interests.

2 Senator Mlotshwa passed away four years after delivering this Motion. She was 53 years old.

3 See the Global Survey of Circumcision Harm at [www.circumcisionharm.org](http://www.circumcisionharm.org).
Mr. President, seeing the escalation of the spread of HIV often after cutting three-quarters of the young boys organs [skin systems] off, will the government not make an attempt of cutting girls also since at its inception, the circumcision programme, the government, its funders and implementers were citing best practices learnt from other countries? Will they not think of cutting the young girls? This circumcision of young boys is tantamount to genital mutilation that this supermodel [Waris Dirie] went through in her country. These boys will write the same books about our cruelty to them when they discover what we did to their organs.

Mr. President, I can foresee since it is reported that circumcised men shun using condoms for the benefit of the female partner, it is there in the advert that “I am doing it also for my partner.” So it shows that these men, the mature men, after circumcision do not use condoms because they want to preserve the benefit to this woman.

Will the government not start a programme of minimising the transmission of HIV by reducing the enjoyment in women by cutting their clitoris? That is the question that I am asking myself and my colleagues and everybody else.

Mr. President, we are the representatives of the people. We are concerned that the children of our electorate are finding it very difficult to understand why they are being cut. The reasons that are being given for the lessening of the HIV transmission are not good enough to make a one-month or ten-year-old child to be circumcised. The electorate is looking upon us to protect the young souls and to preserve human rights.

Mr. President, as I mentioned earlier in my introduction, that the said circumcision reduces the risk of cervical cancer. Dear colleagues and honourable senators, the government needs to divert the fund that it is using to circumcise these young children and put it on the Voluntary AIDS Counseling programme.

If we are serious about reducing the risk of cervical cancer in women, let the fund go to testing of this cancer in women so that they get treatment on time. Women cannot wait to benefit through a male organ cutting because if you say you are circumcising men so that you lessen cervical cancer, to me it does not make sense. We cannot wait for our men to be circumcised so that we lessen the cervical cancer. In the rural areas, Mr. President, there are no facilities to conduct cancer tests for women and it is always detected too late. Can we not use this fund that we have to circumcise these young children into the women?

When I was researching, I read somewhere that the world over, the adverts of circumcision are the best. Different countries do their best to advertise, but when I look at the statistics of our young boys who have gone through the circumcision, I am failing to understand how it scales down the transmission because they are not doing anything.

There is a case of witchcraft in Zimbabwe. We so much want to use the parts of a body of a person to pursue finance, marriage, or work. What happens to those foreskins of 100 boys that are put in a basket by this doctor? What happens to those foreskins of these children, colleagues? Is it not better to give each person his foreskin to dispose of way they see it fit? This is because putting them together in a basket will invite witchcraft. We so much want to get married today and we want to use the young boys’ foreskins to mix with whatever we mix with to get more money, etc. It is known in Africa that parts of a body are better in trying to do that. Even for grown-up people who are mature, why do you leave your foreskins to be mixed with whoever’s foreskin [is] in the basket there, when a doctor can be bought to put all those foreskins together and go and sell them? Who is there to see that these foreskins are disposed of?

Mr. President, in developed countries, complications are broadcast in the public domain so that citizens have statistics of the good and the bad. A midwife dressed a wound in olive oil and the baby died the following day.

Mr. President, last month in the Eastern Cape in South Africa, 32 children died and 106 are still in hospital because of the primitive circumcision done for cultural benefits by Xhosa and Sotho people. Because the boys are kept away in the mountains, some organs are said to have become septic and volted because the traditional means of maintaining a clean wound are never practised. These tragedies happen because mature people like us want to fulfill a traditional ego of becoming a real man.

Stop genital mutilations of children, Mr. President. A petition to the World Court was tabled at a symposium that referred to sexual mutilation as a human tragedy, as late as 1996 in Switzerland. They looked at the body parts being removed that are for sexual function, in both boys and girls, and also the immediate and long-term complications.

Mr. President, I urge the government to leave the small male organs alone, the owners will decide when they are old enough to know the reasons why their organs are being reshaped or modified.
Mr. President, in the Seventh Parliament, the Zimbabwe parliamentarians against HIV and AIDS organised such an exercise here in Parliament. I know, because I was the secretary, that less than 20 MPs were circumcised.

If this programme has to show results of the decline of transmission, the government should stop circumcising young children and intensify on mature men. If it means checks at every roadblock, so be it. The attitude of grown males towards this programme is questionable, whereas they are the risk factor.

In conclusion, I call on the government to stop this programme of child circumcision. I urge the minister to make a response before the close of this Parliamentary Session, because I believe children under the age of 18 years should be protected and given a chance of having their organs fully developed and to be circumcised by choice and for what they understand. There is no reverse once the young organ is modified. If the fathers of these young children were circumcised at a late stage after 40 or 60 years, why can we not give our children a chance to decide especially when they start indulging? I believe it can be done.