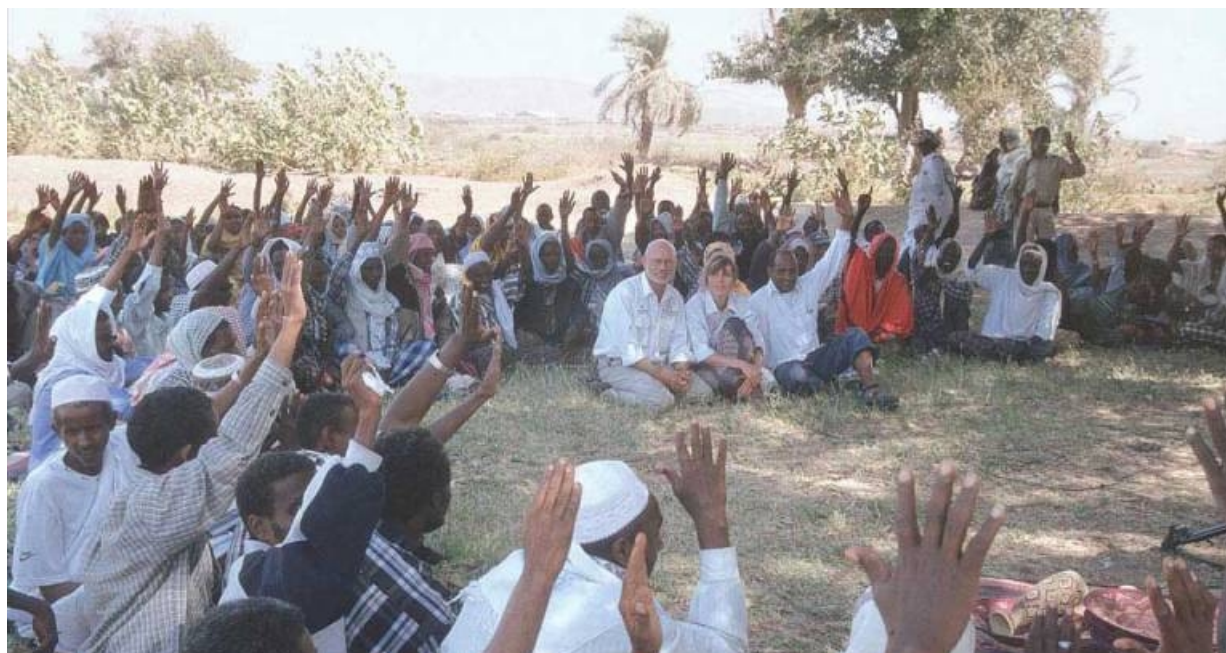


# Newsletter 2002



TARGET is two years old.  
We had high hopes.  
Here is the result!

## The desert conference

### Dear friends,

we – Annette Weber, Rüdiger Nehberg – had invited them all: 30 political and 30 religious leaders of the Afar in Ethiopia and their wives. We had invited them to a conference in the middle of the Danakil-desert. TARGET paid for travel expenses, the stay, the food and some general expenses for everyone.

Three months before, our friend and interpreter Ali Mekla Dabala had given out the invitations via local intermediaries. Time enough to reach each chief of the nomadic Afar. It was very important to us that all be there.

**Flash back January 2001** – Rüdiger and Annette are in Ethiopia. They rent a camel-caravan to get to the nomadic Afar (a people of 3.5 million) in the Danakil-desert. The Afar routinely practice female genital mutilation. Some of them even mutilate their four-week-old girls. Pharaonic mutilation. That means that all outer genitals such as clitoris and labia are cut off and the vagina is closed with acacia-thorns. Their main reason: „This is what Allah wants. The Koran says so.“ And that is not true. Annette takes pictures and makes films of this horror. The Sultan of the Afar Ali-Mirah promises to support our Pro-Islamic-Alliance against female genital mutilation.

### January 31st, 2002

We are anxious. Will they all come when a foreigner invites them to discuss a topic that is taboo among themselves? Well, not quite a foreigner. 25 years ago Rüdiger crossed their desert with friends. Twice the hospitality of the Afar saved their lives.

The older ones remember this. And of course, they remember his visit a year ago. Rüdiger feels obliged to the Afar. Today he wants to thank them. They know that he and Annette are motivated by neither missionary nor financial causes. They act solely to abolish female genital mutilation. To save the lives of girls and women. We come as friends and in humility.

In the end not only the 120 invited guests arrive, but more than 1000 members of the Afar. We are overwhelmed. „This ist the biggest gathering we have ever had here“, says the representative of the Health Department. Rüdiger has also invited the county authorities. We have to postpone the meeting one day. First we have to procure a generator and a sound-system. Two days of heated discussion follow. The conservatives insist on cutting the clitoris. „Mohammed allowed this. This is what the Hadith\* says.“ „But this is hazardous to the women's health“, Sheikh Darassa, leader of the Highest Council for Islamic Affairs, counters. „Mohammed didn't have his daughters mutilated either. So it can only be right, not to do it.“



Sheikh Darassa, leader of the Highest Council for Islamic Affairs (middle) appeals to the congregation to end any kind of mutilation.

We appeal to our friends to end any kind of mutilation. Women speak up, too. It is deeply moving what they have to say. Nevertheless: the situation is escalating. „Either we are still cutting the clitoris in the future or everything stays the way it is““ The women ask us to consent to this compromise. „This is only a fraction of the suffering we would have to endure otherwise.“ We are cautious and don't say anything. It is their decision now. Sheikh Darassa begins to speak. The conservatives confer. Then the vote. It is sensational. Everybody wants to end mutilation. Not one single counter-vote!!!!!! A custom that is 5000 years old is ended. The women scream with joy. They dance all night. A newborn girl is being brought to Annette. „You are her second mother. Because of your initiative, my daughter won't be mutilated.“ Goose-flesh in the middle of the desert.

The new law will be added to the holy Shari'a of the tribe. With this it is binding for all Afar. More than any federal law.

**September 2002:** Rüdiger flies to Ethiopia. He wants to check if the new law is obeyed. Our intermediaries have not heard of anybody's breaking it.



Men and women debate at the desert conference

## VIPs congratulate

Word about our success with the Afar travels fast. Our own idols Karl-Heinz Böhm and Waris Dirie (author of the book „Desert Flower“, special UN-ambassador against female genital mutilation) visit us personally to congratulate and encourage us. We agree on close cooperation.

The German president Johannes Rau, through politician Heide Simonis, awards Rüdiger the order „Bundesverdienstkreuz am Bande“. This is for his 20-year-long engagement for the Yanomami, but also for his work against female genital mutilation, his „... dialogue with Islamic leaders ... respect for their values and traditions ... exceptional example for successful dialogue between cultures ... (and) concrete results.“ This is all the motivation we need.



Annette Weber and Karl-Heinz Böhm

## The Mobile Hospital

Daimler Chrysler donated a truck. Now, we are trying to fix it up, to make a moving hospital out of it. It is supposed to be our thank-you to the Afar, a reward for the result of the desert conference. For their courage to make such an unprecedented important decision.

A doctor and a nurse will assist the girls and women with medical expertise and will help reduce the tremendous health-hazards of the mutilation. A local teacher will talk about the problems of mutilation and will also teach basic hygiene and reading and writing. „Menschen für Menschen“, Karl-Heinz Böhm's organization, will help us with the local authorities.

# Sensation in Cairo

Allahu akbar! July 13th, 2002. Prof. Dr. Mahmoud Hamdi Zakzouk, the Egyptian Minister of Religion, has agreed to see us! We seek his advice how to declare female genital mutilation as religious presumption and discrimination against the Islam and thus be able to abolish it worldwide. Even though Christians and other religious groups practice the custom, we want to reach our aim with the help of the Islam. We think that the Islam is the strongest force in the areas in question.

The Minister mediates a conference with his Eminence, the Grand-Sheikh Dr. Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, religious leader of the sunnite Islam, at the Al-Azhar-University, the intellectual center of the Islam. The Grand-Sheikh acts quickly. His opinion regarding mutilation is clear. He takes our document and adds in his own handwriting:

“The mutilation of women is a custom, no religious duty. All of the recorded Hadiths\* concerning female genital mutilation are weak (which means, not authentic).“

The Grand-Sheikh of Al-Azhar Muhammead Sayyid Tantawi 07/13/2002

(\*collection of actual and alleged statements of the Prophet)



Rüdiger Nehberg consults Grand-Sheikh Tantawi

We receive an e-mail from Wolfgang Bindseil, our contact and advisor in the German embassy in Cairo: „I openly admit, that the result of your visit has exceeded my expectations and I am happy that you were able to have such fruitful discussions not only with the Minister of Religion, but also with the Grand-Sheikh of Al-Azhar.“

We are already on our way to reach our ultimate goal: We want our declaration to be read by the Saudi-Arabians in the heart of the Islam.

**In Mecca!**

## A medical station for the Indians

Our highlight in March: The chiefs of the Waiapí had asked for a medical station for their people. The 4000 Waiapí are – just like the Yanomami – an Indian people in Brazil, Amapá, who have decided to live as traditionally as possible. They defend a piece of forest double the size of the German Saarland – ultimately for the sake of all people. We thought that earned some service in return.

Our builder Hosti Jose from Macapá / Brazil finished the house. A real jewel in the middle of the rain forest. Together with representatives of the Indian Agency FUNAI we inaugurated it. FUNAI will supply the medical station with personell and medicine.



Our medical station in the Brazilian jungle

## Support through patrons

We are baffled by the ideas our patrons have to raise funds for TARGET. Hobby-gardeners sell their produce and donate the money. Others forgo presents and donate the money. A plumber from Stuttgart put up a toilet on a building site: „Take a pee for TARGET!“ A young girl colors Easter eggs, sells them and donates the money. Festivals, flea-markets, inheritances... there are a lot of ideas. It is all a question of fantasy and the will to do it.

This support makes us happy, thankful and strong. It is the perfect symbiosis. You, the patrons, are our reliable „back-office“. We, the activists, are in the line of fire.

If you have the time, visit our homepage [www.target-human-rights.com](http://www.target-human-rights.com). There you will find everything that's new. And you can find out when Rüdiger will be in your vicinity.

Our thanks for the support of our work goes to the German embassies in Cairo and Addis Abeba, the Auswärtige Amt in Berlin, the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, the Arabian school Ibu Khaldun in Berlin, to the Minister of Religious Foundations Prof. Dr. Mahmoud Hamdi Zakzouk and to the Grand-Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Dr. Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi in Cairo.

Most sincerely yours, Rüdiger Nehberg and Annette Weber