

Annual report 2005 – short version

Rüdiger Nehberg's "Caravan of Hope" Spreads the Message of the Grand Mufti to End Female Genital Mutilation in Mauritania

There has never been a comparable action in the Islamic world. In the name of his eminence, Grand Mufti Hamden Ould Tah of Mauritania, Rüdiger Nehberg and Annette Weber were able to spread the message developed with him in the Mauritanian desert in spring 2005. For 50 days, twelve camels went from oasis to oasis, from person to person. Bearing the message in white script on green flags:

"Islam says no to female genital mutilation. It is a sin!"

The idea originated with the Grand Mufti personally: "This is the only way to reach the people living in isolated areas."

In December 2004, the Grand Mufti, two of his closest advisors and the mayor of Chinguetti travelled to Hamburg specially to promote this project. At the request of the Hamburg Senate, Rüdiger Nehberg, Annette Weber and the Mauritanian guests made the public aware of their project with the help of a mini caravan of five dromedaries outside Hamburg City Hall. Accompanied by a banner that could not be overlooked: "Islam says NO to female genital mutilation. It is a sin!"

Under the patronage of Ole von Beust (CDU), the caravan was introduced to a press conference by Hamburg's second lady mayor, Birgit Schnieber-Jastram.

The caravan was a great success. Nehberg: "We were overwhelmed by the public, who accompanied the caravan everywhere. The elderly people examined the Grand Mufti's message and practically flung themselves at us when they heard it. Women and girls made their thanks with presents. Our flags fluttered above schools and tents.

Via TV channel El Gezira the project is also to be disseminated as far as possible in other countries. It is hoped that this will provoke discussions and help to accelerate the end of the tradition.

Hamden Ould Tah: "The politicians in my country are now on board. They have to support the ban legally. The appropriate bill is now being prepared. As soon as it is passed by parliament, I will have my legal opinion announced in all mosques in the country."

Politics has met its obligation. The new Mauritanian head of state Vall used his power and banned mutilation by decree on 5th December 2005. Now the Grand Mufti is on board.

The German Federal Court of Justice protects girls from genital mutilation!

Who would have thought it? Not us either. Do you remember? In the 2003 Rundschreiben we reported on a fifteen year old Gambian girl in Dresden. Late in the evening on the 23rd December a relative of the family called us. The mother wanted to send the child to her grandmother in Gambia. There mutilation awaited her – just as had happened to her mother. As the police seemed to be helpless (“We are not responsible, they are both Gambians!”), TARGET immediately alerted the Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Heidemarie Wiecek-Zeul, and the on-duty federal prosecutor (it was now Christmas Eve). In a lightning operation with the Dresden Youth Welfare Office, the minister arranged that the girl was taken away from her mother and was temporarily placed with a German family in Obhut. The mother protested. And she lost. On all counts. The Family Law Panel at the Federal Court of Justice (BGH): “The threatened mutilation is a barbaric mistreatment that cannot be justified.” The court approved the partial suspension of the right to determine place of abode and did not preclude removing the child from the mother’s care again at any time in the future to prevent the trip to Gambia (AZ:XII ZB 166/03).

We are pleased that the mother let herself be guided by her lawyer in all instances. Thus, unintentionally they gained protection for many African girls threatened by mutilation here in Germany.

New Honorary Member at TARGET

Sheikh Mohammed Darassa Moussa is the most senior religious judge of the Afar in their new capital Samara, Ethiopia. Ruediger and our special TARGET ambassador Ali Mekla presented him with the TARGET honour medal for his sustained efforts to implement the resolution of 2002, as a result of which the Afar may no longer practice genital mutilation on their girls. Comment: our friends in the region report: the law has still only taken hold regionally. Some families continue to practice mutilation. Therefore, Sheikh Darassa has appointed local advisory teams, who will provide further education and perseverance.