

Today, February 6th, the International Day against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), we want to start a campaign aiming at the explicit inclusion of womenspecific reasons of escape within the Geneva Convention, to which the austrian state has to comply. The Geneva Convention (GC) is mainly directed at reason to escape for men. Equality between the sexes had been statuted as human right in 1948, but female- and genderspecific persecution was not considered a relevant feature of asylum seekers within the Geneva Convention of 1951.

Women escape for the same reasons as men: poverty, war, torture, hunger, lack of education or medical care. Beside that, women are threatened of human rights violation which they only face for their gender identity, like genital mutilation, forced prostitution, forced marriage, stoning, suttee, rape, domestic violence, femicide within families, trafficking in women, rejection or inaccessibility of education and others.

These women specific human right violations are not decidely acknowledged as reasons of escape, since violence against women was treated only as discrimination and not as human right violation. The resultions of the European Parliament and UNHCR in the 1980ies are considered to be the first steps toward acknowledgement of womenspecific reasons of escape. They suggest to consider asylum seeking women, who face hard or inhumane condition for not complying with social norms, to be a special social group as described in the Geneva Convention. On this behalf the european states should decide as sovereigns (Artikel 1 A(2) Geneva Convention). Therefore women are only included as belonging to a social group within the Geneva Convention. In Austria there is only §20 declaring asylumseekers shall be interviewed by a person of the same sexe, when they announce their sexual self-determination as reason for persecution. Further asylum seekers must be informed

about that possibility. In reality this paragraph is not applied, but quite often rejected. For women coming from societies that deem interaction with men uncommon, it is traumatizing to explain their experiences in front of a man. On their way to Europe women mainly get to know stories about the asylum procedure experienced by men. They know nothing about their rights, and therefore almost never talk about their personal, genderspecific reasons to escape.

We demand that women must be informed about their rights before the asylum procedure and every interview starts, and that every interview and translation has to be made by women.

The acknowledgement of womenspecific reasons of escape is currently mostly made by second instance. An explicit paragraph would extremely improve the procedure for women.

But it is not only the legal situation which is worse, as well the living condition and accomodation women have to face are very bad. In the lager they are exposed to sexual violence and harassment by escaped men and lager staff. There are often no separate rooms, no place of retreat and no separate sanitary facilities. Eventhough a lot of women confront this situation and complain, the staff is not responding to most of the cases.

Refugee women and women from europe have to fight together for their liberation. We have the same goals.

Violence against women is a human right violation

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Women rights are human rights!