

Healthy Tomorrow's **Project Stop Excision**, works against the practice of female genital cutting (FGC) in Mali through a signature campaign, the **Pledge Against Excision** and through songs and media. The Pledge Against Excision, a promise never to excise a girl, has been shown to be a good mobilizing tool, starting conversations and giving a concrete action that people can do, who oppose FGC, or excision.

Our experience shows that there is quite a bit of opposition to FGC but that, since there is little active mobilizing, people who agree with us don't realize that they are so numerous. Our goal is to give them the courage to speak up. We have seen that courage is often contagious.

In 2002, 30 groups, including Amnesty Int'l and Planned Parenthood, as well as some individuals, joined together to collect signatures on the Pledge Against Excision. Now we have 45 partner groups and about 14,000 signatures, including those of many influential people.

Recent successes include enlisting the help of major religious leaders, who've spoken out publicly, and convincing a village that was about to hold a large excision ceremony to cancel it.

Founding member Susan McLucas has worked in Mali for 7 years, as a volunteer in the struggle against FGC. In that time, she has initiated and produced the poster "Let's Stop Excising," and the album Stop Excision. She also helped to start the Pledge Against Excision.

The poster has been distributed all over Mali in 4 languages, and is a common sight at hospitals and elsewhere in Mali.

The album Stop Excision is still being played on Malian radio and sold in the markets. Many of the biggest stars in Mali participated in writing and singing the songs on the album, which contains 8 songs in 5 local languages against FGC. We have found the album to be very useful in our work and people love dancing to it, including excisers. The album is available from Healthy Tomorrow for \$10-\$20, your choice and all the proceeds go back into the struggle.

Collecting signatures on the Pledge Against Excision has taken us in some unexpected directions. We have found that sometimes the most straight-forward approach can be surprisingly effective. For instance, a number of excisers have agreed to stop practicing, after being approached, respectfully, and in a friendly way, and having the negative aspects of the practice explained to them.

Fifth Person Principle – Siaka Traoré, founding president of Sini Sanuman, was the fifth person to approach our first convert from the practice. This exciser explained to him that she was very angry at the first person to suggest that what she did was not good, still angry but also a little bothered by the second and so on down the line until, when Siaka came to her house and talked to her about stopping, she was ready to bow to group pressure.

She even invited us to her house to lead a meeting, and invited a lot of her friends, including other excisers, to come and discuss the matter. Almost all signed the Pledge. Group pressure can be a positive force. A number of ex-excisers are involved in the campaign, telling people why they stopped and encouraging other to do the same..

Our project encourages people to speak up, reminding them that the worst thing that can happen is that someone will be angry at them and that, even so, they will be preparing the way for the next people to be heard.

When we have enough signatures on the Pledge Against Excision, we will present them to the press. The stories that will be written about the campaign will help spread the word and encourage more people to speak out. We keep track of famous people who sign, so that, when we are ready to publicize the results of the Pledge, it will be easy to find the well-known people among the signers.

We will also present the signatures to the government of Mali, to encourage them to pass a law specifically outlawing FGC. On the Pledge, people are asked if the time is right for such a law and almost everyone who signs, answers yes.

As part of our mobilizing efforts, we distribute a handout, "Stop Excision", which lists the problems with FGC on one side and gives quotes from major religious leaders on the other.

We also have a collection of graphic photographs of serious medical consequences of FGC, which immediately convince many people, including some excisers.

We provide our ex-excisers with certificates of thanks as well as photos of themselves, with copious thanks on the back. Fifty excisers have already signed the Pledge, promising to give up the practice, and some are telling others why. We hope soon to be able to help our ex-excisers in more concrete ways, with employment and micro-credit loans.

We believe that a combination of public personalities, such as the artists on the album, and ordinary public-spirited people like Siaka and the others who invite people to sign the Pledge, will finally break down the resistance to change and allow people to do what is best for their girls.

Affiliation - Boston-based Healthy Tomorrow is affiliated with Cross Cultural Collaborative, Inc. (www.CulturalCollaborative.org) and checks for Healthy Tomorrow's work can be made out to them for tax-deduction purposes, with "Healthy Tomorrow" in the memo line.

In Mali, Sini Sanuman is a non-profit recognized by the Malian government. Our office is right beside Pledge member Amnesty International in Bamako, with whom we collaborate.

Things you can do to help:

- * Learn more about female genital cutting
- * Order the album Stop Excision / distribute it (CDs: \$10-\$20, your choice, Tapes: \$5-\$10)
- * Order the video, We Can Say "No!" to one of the songs on the album, in Bambara
- * Contribute to Project Stop Excision
- * Organize a meeting to hear about the project
- * Help us fund raise, in a variety of ways
- * Join Healthy Tomorrow, attend meetings and help find new ways to end excision..

Healthy Tomorrow

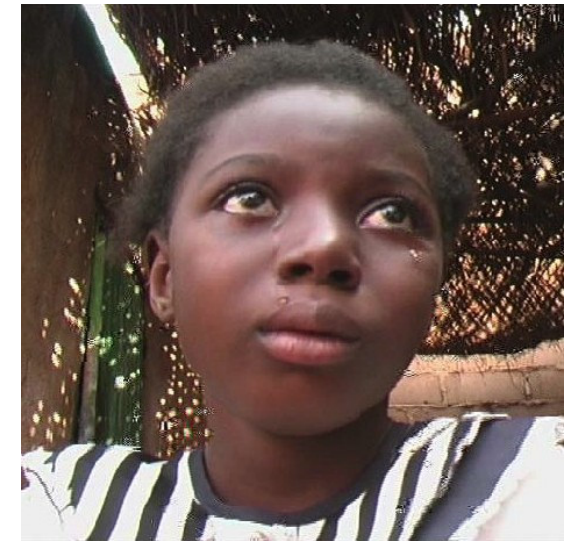
- * www.StopExcision.net, our web site
- * Susan McLucas, director (617) 776-6524, 14 William Street, Somerville, MA 02144, SusanMcL@StopExcision.net
- * keith harmon snow, secretary, (413) 549-5318, KSnow_HT@yahoo.com
- * Ellie Schimelman, director of Cross Cultural Collaborative, Inc., Healthy Tomorrow's sponsoring organization (617) 277-0482, Aba@CulturalCollaborative.org

Sini Sanuman

- * Siaka Traore, founding president, BP E 3885, Bamako, Mali, (223) 222 54 50 or 602 14 11, SiniSanuman@yahoo.fr (must be in French)
- * Saloum Traore (no relation) director of Amnesty Int'l - Mali, (223) 220 31 13 SaloumD@yahoo.fr (can be in English)

Healthy Tomorrow Sini Sanuman

(in the Bambara language)



a humanitarian organization dedicated to eradicating female genital cutting (FGC) in Mali, through education, community discussion, mobilization and music.