

## January 2012: Phase II, in the Mission to End Female Genital Mutilation<sup>1</sup> in Uganda: Inspire the Youth! Galvanize the Leaders! Transform the Culture!!



Sabiny girls prepared for mass "circumcision" ceremony in 2010.

It was the last day of our January 2011 conference in Kapchorwa, Uganda. Our mission had been to help cast a vision of life without Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) for the Sabiny people. The Sabiny are the larger of the last two tribes in Uganda who still practice this abusive tradition on their young ladies ages 14-16 (see footnote.) In attendance were 190 pastors, lay church leaders and local tribal leaders, as well as the Bishop of Anglican Diocese of Sebei Region. Pastor Fred Chemowo, the youth mission's pastor for the entire diocese, sat next to me on this jubilant day as we wrapped up the conference in which God had done miracles!

At the beginning of the conference, the participants listed the reasons why the community wanted to continue to practice FGM. But after our 5 day conference, teaching from the biblical, biological, and medical points of view, **all participants were in complete agreement that their people must abandon FGM! They now had a much deeper understanding, not only of why FGM was not in their best interest, but that FGM does the exact opposite of what they intended the practice to do. More importantly they had also come to the communal realization that they were together in this mission to end the practice. Their bishop had, with tears, confessed his remorse about participating in FGM ceremonies before his ordination, and asked for forgiveness.**

The youth pastor who sat next to me held in his heart a burden for the spiritual lives of all the Sabiny youth in **this tribe of about 225,000 people**. Pastor Fred said he needed to speak to me "seriously." I could not quite read the expression on his face. He seemed excited, anxious, thrilled and worried all at the same time. The excited and thrilled part I could easily understand. Just the night before, **God had led all conference participants to make resolutions to bring FGM to an end in each of the four large tribal areas where the Sabiny people live in Eastern Uganda. No Sabiny group had ever made resolutions to end FGM before! That was thrilling.** It was Pastor Fred's anxious and worried expression that puzzled me.

---

<sup>1</sup> Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). There is no gentle way to describe FGM. It is the ancient custom of cutting out a girl/woman's clitoris and cutting off her labia majora and minora so that she will feel no pleasure in intercourse, and too much pain to be tempted to have sex before marriage or with anyone other than her husband. In Uganda, this "operation" is performed in a community ceremony that is a rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood. The local "surgeons," who have no medical experience or knowledge, line the girls up on the ground with everyone watching, including the men who will pick their brides based on how brave the girl is when her genitals are cut out of her body without any anesthesia. Then one by one each precious girl's body is forever mutilated.

He leaned in close, and said, "Now Patti, you see what has happened. This is very, very wonderful." But the look on his face did not seem to whole-heartedly agree with his words. He continued, "As you have learned, it is between the ages of 14 and 16 that every Sabiny female must be 'cut' in order to be considered a Sabiny woman, participate in family and community activities, and be eligible to marry a Sabiny man" The look of Pastor Fred's face became even more intense. "Now, these adult leaders have seen the light, and we must be grateful to God for that. . ." He paused and then said what he really needed to say.

"Having resolutions from the adults is a good thing, **but the Sabiny youth do not know what you have just taught their elders.** If they do not learn the same things; if they are not allowed to have their questions answered, and see their age-mates **decide together** to abandon the practice, I fear all may be lost," he said.

I asked Fred if he did not think the adults would go back and teach the youth and their parents. He said, "Yes, they will go and fulfill their resolutions to the best of their ability. But this is a practice that has been deeply ingrained in everyone's thinking. Boys believe that 'uncut' women are unclean and that it is impossible for an uncut woman to be a faithful wife. They will never marry an uncut girl. And girls have been made to live in fear of the horrible life they will suffer if they are not cut."

Then he took my hand and with a look of both pleading, and commanding leadership he said to me, "**Now, you will promise me that next year you will teach the youth what you have taught their elders? The girls are cut every two years in December on the even numbered year. You must promise me that you will come in January 2012 to prevent the cutting that will surely take place in December of that year if the youth do not also agree to abandon FGM!**"

I saw no more excitement in his face, only anxiety. He knew how expensive it had been for me and my team to come all this way from 3 continents. He feared that our lives might be too busy and that we could not get away from America, Finland, and the big city of Kampala just to serve the youth of Sebei Diocese. But, he saw how God had used the biblically based information we presented to transform the thinking of these adults in ways that no secular organization, no government or law had been able to do. He knew that what had taken place that week within the hearts of his fellow Sabiny spiritual leaders was something that only God could have done, and he wanted that for his youth.

**I made that promise, and we are going back! We leave December 30th and we will hold two conferences simultaneously on January 9-14, 2012.** One conference will bring the most influential leaders from the January 2011 conference back, as well as bring in those pastors who could not (or perhaps, would not) come last January. We will reinforce last year's teachings and add to it a very important piece. The leaders are in need of strategies for resolving conflict when they encounter opposition to this monumental change in their culture. **Marilyn Raatz will be teaching conflict transformation skills** to this group of about 100 of the most influential clergy in the diocese, as I am teaching the Sabiny youth. We have been told to expect **over 1,000 youth** between the ages of 13 to 30.

Will you please help us empower the Sabiny girls to stand together against FGM, and to convince the boys that a faithful marriage is more possible with a happy, healthy wife, than with a mutilated one! Also, the Sabiny spiritual leaders need to be encouraged, and their resolve reinforced. Please help us **Inspire the Youth, Galvanize the Leaders, and Transform the Culture!!**

## ***Life Together International 2012 FGM Conference, Kapchorwa, Uganda***

Serving the Sabyinyo people means serving some of the poorest of God's children. The average pay for a pastor in this area is \$25 a month! None of them can afford to come to a conference if it means an extra expense for their family. For any of these brothers and sisters to hear what God may want them to hear, we must provide food to feed them 3 meals a day for 5 days; hire cooks to feed over 1,100 people; housed participants (meagerly) in a school dormitory for the week; rent 2 generators and 2 sound systems (there is no electricity in the churches where the conferences will be held), accommodate and feed ourselves (also meagerly in a "hotel" without running water), hire a van and driver at \$150 a day plus his accommodation (he will make a 6 hour trek up and down dangerous mountain roads at least 3 times during the week to pick up expert speakers who can only come for one day); plus fuel, conference supplies, emergency medical contingency funds, security guards, and a number of other costs. Conducting two conferences with over 1,000 youth and 100 church leaders will require at least **\$8,500** beyond what we currently have.

### **Please help us with a donation of any amount!**

You can surely imagine the spiritual warfare we will be up against, so even if you cannot help financially, please pray for us as often as God brings us to mind!

With hope and gratitude,



Patti Ricotta

*President~Life Together International*

If you choose to give, please make checks out to:

***Life Together International***

Mail to:

***Life Together International***

**292 Old Queen Anne Rd.**

**Chatham, MA 02633.**

If you have questions please call or email Patti Ricotta at: 508.945.3894  
pattiricotta@gmail.com

You can also support this work through a Finnish NGO, RaTas ry. Please contact Anne Mikkola for the bank account (IBAN number) to make your donation in euros. Email: anne.mikkola@saunalahti.fi.