RIGHTS OF INTERSEX CHILDREN TAKE CENTRE STAGE ON DAY 3 OF CHILDREN’S AMENDMENT BILL PUBLIC HEARINGS

The Portfolio Committee on Social Development heard on Thursday that intersex corrective surgeries on children are a human rights violation tantamount to genital mutilation. Intersex South Africa’s representative, Ms Nthabiseng Mokoena, said the problem sets in when doctors and society see sexual variations as disorders.

Ms Mokoena said: “Because society perceives boy and girl as normal, intersex variations necessitate corrective measures through surgical intervention. These cosmetic changes are undertaken to fit children to what doctors consider as normal. A lot of the treatments are harmful, have no benefit to the child, and are only meant to fit the child into what is considered as normal to society. This is torture to a child who could not consent to a surgery.”

She said the worse part is that after surgery, no support is given to a child who has to live with irreversible health consequences, physical and mental complications, emotional and family issues for the rest of their lives.

“Doctors do not give full information to the parents. There are no channels for a legal recourse afterwards. Things are done to your child’s body without your knowledge and understanding of the consequences,” Ms Mokoena said.

The Chairperson of the committee, Mr Mondli Gungubele, said this was a touchy subject. He said: “This is an exposure of the horror of human ignorance. If we are in the dark about who we are, the consequences are what had just been explained to the committee.”

The committee sat for its third day of public hearings on the Children’s Amendment Bill.

Presentations were received from the Professional Social Workers in Private Practice, Fathers for Justice, Sonke Gender Justice, Solidarity Guild for Social Workers, Cause for Justice, Women Legal Centre, and the Catholic Institute for Education, among others.

The organisations highlighted a number of other issues, including protecting children against human trafficking, media content and children, challenges related to adoption, clash of suppressive cultural practices and the law,

It was clarified that although the Constitution upholds the right to practise culture, such customs must comply with the Constitution and the law. “Forced marriages are a violation of the Constitution,” said Women Legal Centre’s Mandi Mudarikwa.

**By Sibongile Maputi**
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