

EMBARGOED UNTIL 1201 AM OCTOBER 25, 2016

## THE MOST COURAGEOUS GIRLS IN THE WORLD

The most courageous girls in the world who are risking everything, including their lives to escape their destiny, are being given a voice by Vancouver filmmaker Giselle Portenier.

The girls, in Northern Tanzania, are leaving everything and everyone behind and braving lions, leopards and their parents in their effort to run away to a Safe House. The children are escaping being mutilated on the orders of their own parents. Some are as young as eight years old.

Female Genital mutilation/cutting involves cutting off part or all of a girl's external genitalia. There are no benefits—only harm including the chance of infection and even death. It's estimated that 200,000 girls and women worldwide have been through FGM/FGC, including 8 million in Tanzania. There are no benefits to the procedure, only harm, and girls regularly die as a result.

Portenier has launched an Indiegogo Crowdfunding campaign to try to raise the money to document the girls' heroic efforts to save themselves from harm. Portenier says the funding climate for documentaries like these is so cold, documentarians have little choice but to think out of the box. "The story of these girls who are throwing caution to the wind and running for their lives simply needs to be told, and so I'm jumping head first into the precarious world of crowdfunding."

Portenier is looking to raise \$115,000 Canadian dollars to fund a filming trip to Tanzania this Christmas. That's the school holidays, when the 'Cutting Season,' happens, and thousands of girls are at risk. The timing is designed so the girls can recover before they return to school. Many of the girls, however, don't return to school as the parents marry them off in exchange of a bride price of a few cows.

The two-time Peabody award-winning filmmaker says female genital mutilation is a tough topic that broadcasters have little time for—even though 200 million women in the world today have been subjected to the ordeal, *and a girl is cut every 11 seconds*.

"It boggles the mind that there are all kinds of reality tv shows, and so much junk, but fundamental human rights issues about girls, children in fact, simply don't find any takers," Portenier said.

Portenier just returned from a recognizance trip to the Safe House in Mugumu, and heard girls as young as ten describe how last December they left their homes in the middle of the night and walked for hours to safety. "We were sleeping in a tree, when we saw two lions passing. It

was very scary,” 13-year-old Janet said. “Parents don’t have a right to cut their girls, they only have a right to educate them and help them fulfil their dreams,” she continued.

These girls, says Portenier, are not just courageous, they’re wise and smart and determined to change their destiny.

She says she hopes the Indiegogo campaign will not just raise funds, but awareness.

In December, hundreds of girls are expected to pitch up at the Safe House which was built for four girls.

Trailer available on request

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