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Woman advocates for better life in Kenya

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Woman advocates for better life in Kenya
An African woman wants to change the way girls are treated in Kenya.

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 By Lyanne Melendez

BERKELEY, CA (KGO) -- An African woman who endured atrocities in her native land has a way you can help make a better life for young girls there.

An African woman is fighting to change the way girls are treated in her country. She's trying to stop 10-year-old girls from being married off or turned away from school.

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An African woman is fighting to change the way girls are treated in her country. She's trying to stop 10-year-old girls from being married off or turned away from school.

Hellen Nkuraiya's children are girls who by now may have been married off to older men.

Nkuraiya visited the Bay Area and brought awareness about her own experience of being circumcised and denied an education as a member of the Maasai Tribe in Kenya.

"Circumcision in our culture is a sign of showing you have graduated from childhood to adulthood so immediately you are circumcised. Mostly the girls who are in school drop out of school," said Nkuraiya.

Then many are forced into arranged marriages.

"They prefer girls to be married, often in exchange for cows than going to school," said Nkuraiya.

Nkuraiya did complete her education because she found people willing to sponsor her. Now as a teacher, she does the same for other girls.

She has help from a Bay Area organization called the Asante Africa Foundation. Erna Grasz founded the organization two years ago.

"One latte buys a text book, one movie ticket buys a school uniform, one Friday night dinner out on a date, buys a month's worth of porridge for 100 children," said Grasz.

On Friday, Nkuraiya told her story to a group at the Lawrence Berkeley National Lab.

"Last year alone she had three death threats on her life from fathers in the community that did not believe the girls' education should be a part of their culture," said Grasz.

"I tell them there are two things in life, if I fear I'll die, if I don't fear I'll still die if they kill me for these innocent girls, I die with dignity," said Nkuraiya.

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