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**Call for Further Action to Prevent Abuses of Human Rights Due to the Belief in Witchcraft**

The recent call by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, for authorities in Tanzania to take further action to prevent the killings of albinos linked has been warmly welcomed by the UK-based Non-Governmental Organisation – the Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN)[[1]](#endnote-1).

Hundreds of albino people have been murdered in Tanzania over the last decade due to the belief that their body parts, which are often cut from live victims, carry certain supernatural powers. Albino body parts, especially the limbs, eyes, tongues, breasts, and genitals, are used in rituals by witchdoctors in an effort to bring about wealth and good fortune. However, despite numerous cases being reported to the authorities, successful prosecutions have been very thin on the ground with only 5 cases having been recorded since 2000[[2]](#endnote-2).

Whilst Navi Pillay’s call for Tanzanian authorities to strengthen their legal response to such crimes and increase their efforts to bring perpetrators of attacks and killings to justice was echoed by WHRIN Executive Director, Gary Foxcroft, according to him this alone would not be enough to prevent further killings of albinos.

“Laws and policies alone will not put a stop to these horrific forms of human rights abuses. In addition to wide-spread awareness raising activities to demystify the perceived supernatural powers of albinos, government agencies need to look at the role that Nollywood films are playing in promoting these beliefs. Such films, which are widely viewed in the region and often feature themes relating to witchcraft, help spread such superstitious beliefs and, as such, need to be regulated more effectively by the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board[[3]](#endnote-3)”.

Noting that the killings of albinos in Tanzania is just one of many human rights abuses carried out around the world due to the belief in witchcraft, Foxcroft called on the UN to take a stronger leadership role in fighting this growing menace, starting with organising an international conference on the issue.

“This week alone WHRIN has documented cases of a spate of ritual killings in Cameroon[[4]](#endnote-4), children being accused of witchcraft and tortured in Nigeria[[5]](#endnote-5), a man cut to pieces and burned in Papua new Guinea[[6]](#endnote-6) and three children being beheaded in Uganda[[7]](#endnote-7). This is the tip of the ice-berg and more cases come to the fore on a daily basis. Whilst issues such as child soldiers and female genital mutilation (FGM) have received significant attention from UN bodies and governments, human rights abuses linked to the belief in witchcraft has slipped under the radar. The time has come for more attention to be paid to this emerging issue and for greater efforts to be made to find solutions to it”.

ENDS

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1. The Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN) is a new organisation that has been launched in response to the widespread violations of human rights that takes place around the world due to the beliefs in witchcraft and spirit possession. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Media.aspx [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See - <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=1143997775&story_title=The-curse-that-is-Nollywood> and <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/08/world/africa/08albino.html?pagewanted=all> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <http://www.whrin.org/cameroon-wave-of-ritual-killings-spark-panic-in-cameroon-increase-safety-measures/> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.whrin.org/nigeria-child-witch-saga-father-tortures-6-yr-old-daughter-for-five-days/ [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. http://www.whrin.org/papua-new-guinea-villagers-chop-man-to-pieces-and-then-burn-his-body-parts-to-ashes-after-he-was-accused-of-being-a-witch-doctor/ [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.whrin.org/uganda-three-children-found-headless/ [↑](#endnote-ref-7)