

For Immediate Release – 27th June 2006

Call for President Obama to Demand Urgent Action to Tackle Widespread Human Rights Abuses that Take Place Throughout Africa Due to the Belief in ‘Witchcraft’

As President Obama commences his visit to Africa, we call upon him to use the tour as an opportunity to demand urgent action to tackle the widespread, and systemic, violations of human rights that take place across the Continent due to harmful practices connected to the belief in ‘witchcraft’. Such beliefs are strongly held by many in the countries that he will visit – Senegal, South Africa and Tanzania – and they often lead to some of the most horrific human rights abuses imaginable. Vulnerable individuals and groups in society are most at risk, including older women, street children and people with disabilities.

Of many examples that have been catalogued, in April 2013 the body of the 14 year old boy, Nkhumeleni Mukhado, was discovered in a village in South Africa. His skull and genitals had been removed. His is just one of many similar tragic stories where people are killed so that their body parts can be incorporated into concoctions used in what is labelled as ‘witchcraft’. It is often believed that, through ingesting such concoctions, the receiver will gain greater wealth and power.

In Gambia, which borders Senegal, Amnesty International has documented¹ over 1000 cases of suspected ‘witches’ being rounded up by President Jammeh’s special guards who then tortured the suspects and forced to drink potions that caused them to hallucinate and behave erratically. Many were then forced to confess to being a “witch”. In some cases, they were also severely beaten, almost to the point of death.

In Tanzania, according to the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC)², an average of 500 people were murdered each year on suspicion of ‘witchcraft’ between 2005 and 2011, whilst numerous people with albinism have been murdered in cold blood for their body parts.

Such beliefs and practices self-evidently constitute a significant obstacle to the reputation, peace and prosperity of the region. They inhibit economic growth, investment and trade; weaken democratic institutions; and prevent hundreds of thousands of Africans from reaching their true potential. President Obama should demand that Africa’s political and faith leaders, and the wider international community, do more to put a stop to the horrific human rights abuses that continue to scar this great Continent.

¹ See article - <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/gambia-hundreds-accused-%E2%80%9Cwitchcraft%E2%80%9D-and-poisoned-government-campaign-20>

² See article - http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/29/tanzania-witchcraft-3000-lynchings-witches_n_1553448.html

Signed:

All Party Parliamentary Group on Street Children

American Humanist Association

Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales

Basic Rights Counsel

Bethany Children's Trust

Centre for Human Rights and Development

Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS)

Consortium for Street Children

Greenwich Inclusion Project

Humane Africa

International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU)

Stepping Stones Nigeria

StreetInvest

Under the Same Sun

Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN)

Baroness Sue Miller

Kirsty Brimelow QC

Professor Susan Edwards, University of Buckinghamshire

Dr Christina Oakley Harrington, Treadwells, London.

Russell Brown MP

Craig Whittaker MP

Leo Igwe, Nigerian Humanist Movement

John W. Morehead, Evangelical Chapter of the Foundation for Religious Diplomacy

Hugh Davies OBE QC, 3 Raymond Buildings

Louisa Young , Author

Zoe Young , Film Maker

Paul Stockley , Development Worker