



# 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS & PERSECUTION



**WHRIN**  
THE WITCHCRAFT & HUMAN RIGHTS  
INFORMATION NETWORK

Awareness.  
Understanding.  
Solutions.



## 2013 GLOBAL REPORT

A Report by the Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN)  
Presented at the UN Human Rights Council Session 25 March 10<sup>th</sup> 2014

[www.whrin.org](http://www.whrin.org)



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The report is published in memory of Dr Narendra Dabholkar who made the ultimate sacrifice for fighting the practices outlined in this report.

### Warning!

Readers may find some of the images and stories in this report disturbing.

Please do not read any further if you feel you may be affected by such issues.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In many countries throughout the world, being accused of witchcraft, black magic or other forms of evil, can result in serious violations of human rights including, at the most extreme, torture and death. Women, children, the disabled and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to these forms of abuse.

This is still a world-wide phenomenon that remains largely unrecognised: The extent and distribution of it is largely unknown and, as yet, no formal mechanism exists to record, monitor or respond to such violations. To establish an idea of the global spread of the various spiritual beliefs that result in violations of human rights, WHRIN monitored online media reports in 2013 of cases of abuse and the interventions that have been carried out by governments, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and human rights activists.

This report may represent the first systematic attempt to assess the scale of the problem worldwide and responses to it.

## 2. ORGANISATIONAL BACKGROUND

The Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN) is a response to the wide-spread violations of human rights that take place around the world due to the beliefs in witchcraft and spirit possession. Our work enables greater understanding and awareness of these complex issues so that solutions can be developed to prevent further violations of human rights from taking place.

WHRIN provides a comprehensive, free, on-line information resource, bespoke training and consultancy services and opportunities for networking with other like-minded people. We advocate for change and showcase positive interventions being carried out by communities around the world.

## 3. UNDERSTANDING TERMINOLOGY

### Witchcraft Accusations and Persecution (WAP)

In recent years, thanks to the work of several NGOs, human rights violations that take place due to the belief in witchcraft have entered into the discourse of violence against women, children, disabled and the elderly. These violations are increasingly being recognised as being some of the most horrific abuses witnessed today. Yet the terminology used to document such cases remains, at best, confusing. Terms such as witchcraft accusations,<sup>1</sup> witchcraft allegations,<sup>2</sup> witchcraft branding,<sup>3</sup> or, witchcraft stigmatization<sup>4</sup> are frequently used in order to try and capture the belief that someone is a witch, together with the act of labelling them so. However, each of these terms fails to capture the horror of the subsequent abuse that often takes place due to this belief. Other widely used terms such as witchcraft based violence,<sup>5</sup> or, witchcraft related abuse,<sup>6</sup> make an attempt in this regard. However, such terms only confuse the reader and interventionist/policy makers further, as they suggest that the violence or abuse has taken place due to witchcraft, rather than due to *belief* in witchcraft. This is deeply misleading and potentially dangerous in that they may reinforce the beliefs that lead to such abuse.

<sup>1</sup> Think Africa. Protect or Prosecute? Conjuring up Solutions to Witchcraft Accusations (Jan. 27, 2013), available at <http://thinkafricapress.com/burkinafaso/protect-or-prosecute-african-states-and-witchcraft-accusations>


<sup>2</sup> UNHCR. Witchcraft allegations, refugee protection and human rights: a review of the evidence (Jan 2009), available at <http://www.unhcr.org/4981ca712.html>

<sup>3</sup> The Guardian. Why is child abuse tied to witchcraft on the rise? (Jan. 18, 2012), available at <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/jan/18/child-abuse-witchcraft-exorcism-rise>.

<sup>4</sup> Stepping Stones Nigeria. Witchcraft stigmatization in Nigeria: Challenges and successes in the implementation of child rights (Jan 2013), available at <http://isw.sagepub.com/content/56/1/22.abstract>

<sup>5</sup> Chilimampunga, C. The Extent and Nature of Witchcraft Based Violence against Children, Women, and the Elderly in Malawi (2012), available at <http://www.eldis.org/go/display&type=Document&id=62536#.UhdHds3uSo>

<sup>6</sup> Patheos. The Action Plan to Stop Christian Witchcraft Related Child Abuse (2012), available at <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/wildhunt/2012/08/britains-action-plan-to-stop-witchcraft-related-child-abuse.html>



Whilst other similar forms of human rights violations, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Violence against Women (VAW), have clearly identifiable names and acronyms that are widely used across all fields, the type of violations that this report focuses on have no universally agreed terms. For this reason, the report will introduce a term into the discourse that the authors believe capture the problem succinctly and will form the future basis of all communications on this issue. This new term is “Witchcraft Accusations and Persecution” (WAP).

### What is witchcraft?

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There is no universally accepted definition of witchcraft and the term means different things to different people in different places. Primarily witchcraft can be seen as a negative, malevolent force which is used by people – witches – in the spirit realm to bring about harm in the physical realm. It is the art of doing evil.

However, there are some people, primarily in Europe and the United States, who call themselves ‘witches’. Such people follow a constructed neo-pagan religion, usually called Wicca, which is not witchcraft in the sense that the majority understands it.

### What is a witch?

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For the majority of people, a witch is an evil person who has the ability to bring about all manner of harm. Characteristics include: psychic cannibalism, being able to fly and being able to take animal form in order to bring about harm. It is often believed that the soul of the suspected witch leaves the physical body during the night and enters into the spirit or “witchcraft” world. Here, along with other witches, they cause all manner of harm such as road accidents, spreading illness, joblessness, inability to save money, impotence, infertility, mental health problems etc.

### What is spirit possession?

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This is the belief that a benign (positive) or malignant (negative) force has, whether the person wills it or not, entered their body and is controlling him or her. The individual then becomes taken over by a spirit. Such beliefs are held across all faith groups and can lead to a number of positive or negative outcomes for those who are thought to be possessed by such spirits. In some religions, such as Candomblé or voodoo a god is believed to possess the body of the priest conducting the ritual.

### What is juju?

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Juju is a West African term for the use of black magic. That is magic that is used for a negative end. Juju is often used by human traffickers in order to coerce victims, and ensure that they do as they are told and do not report the trafficker to authorities. Belief in the power of juju is deeply held by the majority of people in this region.

### What is muti?

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Muti is a word used in South Africa to refer to magic that enables people to gain power or wealth. The most extreme form uses human body parts and people may be killed to provide them. The magic is also performed elsewhere in Africa.

### What is human sacrifice?

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Human sacrifice is the act of killing one or more human beings, usually as an offering to a deity, as part of a religious ritual. It has been practiced in various cultures throughout history.

## 4. STUDY OF THE GLOBAL SITUATION

### 4.1 The Study

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During the twelve month period from January to December 2013, WHRIN systematically documented online media reports of violence resulting from beliefs in witchcraft and other malevolent spiritual beliefs. Reports were included if they involved: witchcraft (belief in human use of spiritual powers to cause harm), use of body parts in magic (muti), or human sacrifice.

In order to monitor trends in violence resulting from witchcraft accusations and other malevolent spiritual beliefs members of the Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN) monitored online media reports containing terms such as “witchcraft”, “human sacrifice”, “juju” and “spirit possession” for the duration of 2013. Clearly this research has its limitations, measuring as it does, media interest in such events rather than actual events themselves. The research has also been significantly hindered by the fact that it was only carried out in online media written in English, which may explain why there are high concentrations of reports from Anglophone countries such as India and Nigeria but little or none from ones where English is not widely spoken and used by the local and national media.

Additionally the secrecy and fear that surround such beliefs and accusations in many settings may discourage their public discussion. The fear of further repercussions may also effectively deter any attempt to involve local or national authorities or to seek justice. Those accused, should they be fortunate enough to survive their ordeal, being among the most vulnerable are in all likelihood least able to seek justice. This is particularly the case with children.

As a result of these difficulties, the findings recorded in this report cannot be taken as definitive. Rather they enable the reader to gain a brief insight into what the true international scale of this problem may be. WHRIN contends that the reports of abuse documented within this report are likely to represent the tip of the iceberg of the true global scale of the abuse.

### 4.2 Findings

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A total of 282 reports were documented from 41 countries. Witchcraft beliefs are reported in every continent and are associated with high-levels of violence. The highest number of reports came from the African continent clustered in particular regions or states, including Nigeria (31) and South Africa (29). These figures are likely to reflect considerable under-reporting, particularly when children are accused - with only two and four cases reported from Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria respectively. As with other findings these figures are inconsistent with the experience of organisations providing support to child victims in these settings.<sup>7</sup> It may be that such accusations have become so common they cease to attract attention. It is also possible that previous unwelcome international media coverage discourages local or national reporting.

In Asia, the largest number of reports come from India (64). Twenty five of these cases were of human sacrifice, most usually of children. Nepal also has a high concentration of recorded cases (18). In other regions - South and Central America and Australia – lack of media coverage is inconsistent with what is already known from independent research.

The findings suggest that a minimum of 865 will have experienced violations of their human rights in 2013 due to belief in witchcraft and other malevolent beliefs. This is likely to represent the “tip of the iceberg” of this form of abuse and the true numbers of people experiencing such violations across the world each year are likely to be in the region of many thousands.

The full details of all of the documented cases are available on the WHRIN website.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For further information see: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/jan/24/witchcraft-children-congo-drc-poverty>

<sup>8</sup> [www.whrin.org](http://www.whrin.org)

### 4.3 Witchcraft Accusations and Persecution

This is much the most widespread form of abuse documented. It is reported in every continent and leads to gross violations of human rights all over the world although there are more reports for Africa than any other continent.

One hundred and sixty four reports were of cases where individuals believed to be witches were attacked, and often killed; men, women and children were severely injured, even beaten to death or set alight and burnt to death as a punishment for being judged to have used witchcraft or to be accused of being a witch. One hundred reports were from Africa, with Nigeria (19) and Kenya (14) having the highest concentrations.

In most cases of witchcraft the accused are generally known to at least some of their accusers and many cases erupt as a consequence of conflict within families and/or communities. Wives may be accused and assaulted by their husbands or senior members of the family killed by their (adult) children. Tragically, many other people will join a lynch mob and take part in the violence whether they know the victim or not.

Typically, an individual experiences a particular misfortune (for example, ill-health, poor luck, death or loss) or a series of such events. In their search for explanation, these misfortunes are attributed to witchcraft, usually on the part of someone with whom some kind of a social relationship already exists (however close or tenuous). There are also people who specialise in finding witches, such as the pastors of the new charismatic or Pentecostal African-led churches and Jhankris, or witchdoctors, in places like Nepal and India. This process may often involve someone paying them a fee for their services.

Violence (often fatal) is common when accusations of witchcraft arise, both in eliciting confessions and in terms of punishment. For example, those accused are often tortured (or subjected to ordeals) to elicit a confession. This strategy is likely to be highly effective and can generate further accusations, all of which reinforce the belief and pervasive sense of threat posed by witchcraft.

#### January 2013, Nepal

This couple come from a remote mountain village in Nepal. One day the wife cooked food for the whole of her neighbourhood and the following day all of them fell ill. She was then accused of being a 'witch' by her own sister in law. From that day on she would be blamed for everybody's illnesses; be it some insignificant disease or a major illness and even death. The husband was also blamed for the community's misfortunes as a result of defending and supporting his wife. Following another incident of violence against them, they were both forced to leave their village along with their 4 children.



© Joe Woods

If the guilt is sufficiently established in the minds of the accusers, they will be punished. The punishments invariably involve violence: severe beatings may end in the victim's death. In western Kenya the accused may be tied up or locked in their houses which are then set alight and the occupants burnt to death.<sup>9</sup> In Papua New Guinea women have had petrol and other flammable liquids poured over them and set alight<sup>10</sup>. In other places suspected witches, even children, may be attacked in the street with knives or other weapons. There is a noticeable difference between India and Nepal: in India suspected witches are often killed, sometimes beaten to death, as in 21 cases out of a total of 39 reports of accusations of witchcraft. In Nepal, although in 18 instances witches were stated to have been badly beaten, in only one sixth of the cases (3) were they beaten to death. Children may also be forced out of their homes to live in the street as has been documented in Nigeria<sup>11</sup> and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

<sup>9</sup> Available at [http://www.whrin.org/kenya sisters lynched in kisii village/](http://www.whrin.org/kenya%20sisters%20lynched%20in%20kisii%20village/)

<sup>10</sup> Available at [http://www.whrin.org/sorcery killings in papua new guinea/](http://www.whrin.org/sorcery%20killings%20in%20papua%20new%20guinea/)

<sup>11</sup> Available at [http://www.steppingstonesnigeria.org/images/pdf/Shadow\\_Report\\_Low\\_Res.pdf](http://www.steppingstonesnigeria.org/images/pdf/Shadow_Report_Low_Res.pdf)

The promulgation of Pentecostal and other fundamentalist forms of Christianity, in the United States, Europe and Africa has resulted in the widespread belief that witchcraft is caused by evil spirits that possess the accused. Exorcism, or 'deliverance' is performed to force the spirit(s) to leave. Violent forms of exorcism such as fasting, deprivation of water and of sleep that may be used to traumatise and damage the accused children. The treatment used as exorcism may be lethal.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4.4 Murder to obtain 'magical' ingredients

The perceived power of specific human body parts in magic (known in South Africa and sometimes elsewhere as muti) has resulted in murder and mutilation. This particular form of magic is believed by its adherents to be especially effective in terms of increasing personal wealth, power and prestige. The findings make clear that the practice has been linked to murders and mutilation of children and adults in at least twelve countries in 2013, all of them in Africa. South Africa<sup>13</sup> has the highest reported rates of this form of abuse. The extent to which reports of theft of body parts may be linked to beliefs in magic and witchcraft in South and Central America is unknown.

Muti killings may be undertaken by practitioners of magic or else by third parties specifically commissioned for this purpose. They may be strangers to their victims since the killing is not motivated by specific inter personal conflict. This creates particular challenges for law enforcement in terms of identifying perpetrators whose only motive is financial gain. In Tanzania and many other countries, people with albinism have been specifically targeted for killing and mutilation by practitioners of magic and witchcraft.

##### January 31st 2013: Tanzania

Seven year old boy, Lugolola Bunzari was the victim of a muti murder. His attackers slashed his forehead, right arm and left shoulder, and chopped off his left arm just above the elbow. The boy's grandfather, aged 95, was also killed in the attack as he tried to protect his grandson



#### 4.5 Human sacrifice

Human sacrifice represents a particularly extreme form of violence related to malevolent spiritual beliefs. Most reports come from remote regions of northern India and are associated with the practice of Tantrism, and in particular, with followers of the Hindu goddess, Kali.

##### December 2013, India

"Our country is passing through a phase characterised by superstitions being floated freely through channels in the name of jyotishya (astrology). This is a dangerous social development as gullible people will fall prey for such things and act on their own accord," said Narendra Nayak, President of the Federation Indian Rationalists Associations

A black magic holyman (tantrik) holds a human skull at Guwahati's Kamakhya Temple (above), which is believed to be the highest seat of Tantra or black magic.



Twenty Seven reports were recorded that related to human sacrifice in 2013. India has by far the highest proportion of such cases and reports suggest that community members fear the practice may be spreading.

##### December 2013, India

A tantrik has been arrested for killing a woman in a human sacrifice in Mumbai. The 50 year old Indian woman was killed in a human sacrifice ritual by six people, including a tantrik, in Nalasopara, a suburb of India's commercial capital, Mumbai. Six men have been arrested, including the tantrik. They were advised by him to perform a human sacrifice for health, wealth and prosperity.

<sup>12</sup> Available at <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2013/10/31/here-be-witches>

<sup>13</sup> 19 of 47 reports involving muti killings originated in South Africa

## 4.6 Persecution of Human Rights Defenders

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The few human rights defenders who have spoken out against the practices of WAP, human sacrifice and muti murders often put themselves at risk from community members and those who are profiting from such practices (These are often powerful religious or political leaders). For example, in Nigeria in 2013 the leader of the Liberty Gospel Foundation Pentecostal Church has continued with the campaign of intimidation she launched against activist – Leo Igwe - and NGOs working to prevent WAP against children in the Niger Delta region. This campaign has seen her supporters raid a child rights conference Igwe had organized and beat him up, defamatory websites have been opened, law suits have been filed (and successfully defended), vicious articles have been published in the press and threats made to their lives.

Like Leo Igwe in Nigeria, Dr Narendra Dabholkar, challenged those who have been profiting from promoting malevolent spiritual beliefs in India. He stressed that the belief system itself is the root of the problem of WAP and human sacrifice. Dr Dabholkar established the Maharashtra Andhrashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (Maharashtra Committee for Eradication of Blind Faith) in 1989 to help eradicate superstitious beliefs in witchcraft, black magic, and human sacrifice. Dr. Dabholkar’s state-wide movement targeted religious practitioners who profited from promoting such belief. Through the years, numerous lawsuits have filed against him, vitriolic slurs heaped upon him, and a host of death threats leveled by right-wing Hindus who saw his work as “anti-God.” Still, he carried on with his work, refusing police protection as he pushed the Maharashtra State Assembly to enact legislation criminalizing the act of accusing women of witchcraft and other superstitions.

Dr Dabholkar was well aware of the risks involved in exposing the “godmen”, as he called them, and their so-called miracles. But on August 20, 2013, he was assassinated by two gunmen as he left for his morning walk. The assassination was condemned by a broad spectrum of political leaders and social activists but, as yet, there has been little progress in identifying his murderers.

## 5. PROMISING PRACTICES

A number of positive interventions took place in 2013 that provide observers with a degree of hope that solutions may eventually be developed to prevent further horrific human rights violations from taking place. This includes the following:

### 5.1 Christian Responses

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Moved by the plight of those who have suffered abuse, two new Christian-led groups were formed in 2013 to fight WAP in Africa. The first, made up of some 50 international pastors and scholars from seven African nations, convened in Nairobi to address the growing problem. The Carl F. Henry Centre for Theological Understanding at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, proclaimed at its launch that “this historic gathering marks the first large-scale, international, and interdenominational effort within the church and within the framework of Christian theology to address the growing presence of witch accusations and violence.”<sup>14</sup>

In Britain, the Stop Child Witch Accusations group was formed in 2012 - an alliance of individuals and agencies responding to the reality of children experiencing serious harm or the threat of harm due to accusations of witchcraft. Their work aims to influence churches engaging in harmful beliefs and practices. The launch of both groups marks the first time the Christian community has looked to engage in these issues directly.

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<sup>14</sup> Available at [http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/april/witchcraft accusations prompt large scale responseby.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/april/witchcraft%20accusations%20prompt%20large%20scale%20responseby.html)



## 5.2 Pagan Responses

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The South African Pagan Rights Alliance (SAPRA) was formed in 2004 as a faith based (Pagan) human rights activist alliance. In April 2013 it carried out a 30 Days of advocacy campaign against witch hunts in the country. A petition<sup>15</sup> was launched to lobby the South African government to take action on this issue. They also monitor and document cases of WAP in South Africa under their “Remember Their Names” project.<sup>16</sup>

## 5.3 Humanist Responses

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Humanist groups and individuals continued to be heavily involved with interventions to fight beliefs in witchcraft and support victims of WAP in 2013. For example, in Malawi, the Director of the Malawian Association of Secular Humanism, George Thindwa, has called for an end to violence against suspected witches, maintaining his stand that witchcraft is a belief and that witches do not exist<sup>17</sup>. He then followed up this public statement with an offer of K200,000 to anyone who would bewitch him through magic. The Norwegian embassy has pledged to fund the Malawian Association of Secular Humanism for a three year long program to eradicate witchcraft based violence towards women and children across the country.

## 5.4 Government Responses

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In April 2013, in response to massive international outrage at the latest series of brutal public killings of women accused of witchcraft, Papua New Guinea’s prime minister, Peter O’Neill, vowed to repeal the country’s controversial Sorcery Act. The 1971 Sorcery Act, which criminalizes the practice of sorcery and recognizes the accusation of sorcery as a defense in murder cases. Critics of the law say that it encourages violence against people accused of being sorcerers by codifying black magic as a legal phenomenon.

In July 2013 the European Parliament released their report “Child Witchcraft Allegations and Human Rights”. The report helped to further raise awareness of the impact of the belief in witchcraft on child rights, despite failing to offer any tangible possible solutions to the problem. Hopefully this report may act as a spring board to such agencies further researching these human rights abuses.

In August 2013 in response to Dr Dabholkar’s death, the Maharashtra state government rushed through the “Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act,” which Dr Dabholkar’s had drafted 18 years earlier and had struggled for 14 years to win approval in the Maharashtra State Assembly. Still, a host of Hindu fringe groups have been lobbying against such legislation. The Dharmika Swatantra Rakshana Samithi (Religious Rights Protection Committee) have dubbed such measures “Anti-Hindu Bills,” which they claim would curtail religious rights of Hindus across India—but with no reference to the rights of women who are so often the victims. Other Indian states, such as Odisha, are looking to follow the lead of Maharashtra<sup>18</sup> by enacting legislation to protect women from being accused of witchcraft.

Finally, in August 2013 the President of Cameroon, Paul Biya, took a tough approach to dealing with the growth in Pentecostal churches, many of whom preach about the existence of witchcraft. Sparked by the death of a nine-year-old girl during witchcraft deliverance ceremony at a church<sup>19</sup>, the president used the military to permanently shutdown all Pentecostal churches in the nation’s capital, Yaounde, and the northwest regional capital, Bamenda, which have the nation’s largest Christian populations. More than 50 churches have now been closed, with the government targeting nearly 100 in eight other regions. “We will get rid of all the so-called Christian Pentecostal pastors who misuse the name of Jesus Christ to fake miracles and kill citizens in their churches. They have outstretched their liberty,” Mbu Anthony Lang, a government official in Bamenda, told CNN in August 2013.

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<sup>15</sup> Available at [https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/Stop\\_Witch\\_Hunts/](https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/Stop_Witch_Hunts/)

<sup>16</sup> Available at <http://www.paganrightsalliance.org/remember-their-names/>

<sup>17</sup> Available at <http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/02/07/malawi-humanist-thindwa-gets-norway-aid-defiant-witches-do-not-exist/>

<sup>18</sup> Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh states also have such legislation in place

<sup>19</sup> Pastor David Oyedepo’s Winners Chapel Church is one of the biggest Pentecostal churches in the world.

## 5.5 Community and NGO Responses

There have been sufficient cases of community groups and NGOs taking action against the practice of WAP and the promotion of malevolent spiritual beliefs in 2013 to provide hope that solutions to this problem may be found.

### India, November 10th 2013

Brothers, a social organisation in Assam, organised a bike rally against killing of innocent persons on the suspicion of practising witchcraft in tribal dominated areas.



Of particular note were the actions of the Canadian NGO – Under the Same Sun – who have campaigned tirelessly against the muti murders of Persons with Albinism (PWA) in Tanzania and across Africa. Their work led huge strides being taken to combat this menace at the UN level. In 2013 the UN Human Rights Chief, Navi Pillay, presented a report to the Human Rights Council on the attacks and discrimination against persons with albinism, and expressing concern about the impunity for these attacks. Because of their advocacy work, the Human Rights Council adopted a number of Resolutions (23/13 and 24/33), as did the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights at the end of 2013, which called for the prevention of attacks against persons with albinism. The UN Human Rights Council Advisory Committee announced that it is conducting a year-long study on the human rights situation of persons with albinism to be presented at the Council’s 28th session.<sup>20</sup>

At the grassroot level, human rights activists continue to risk their lives to raise awareness of these human rights violations and support victims. In India, Birubala Rabha (above), who escaped after being declared a witch and given a death sentence by a “court” in her native village near Goalpara in western Assam in 1991, campaigned against witchcraft and witch-hunting. She heads ‘Mission Birubala’ and goes from village to village generating awareness against the practice.

In Nigeria, James and Ese Ibor through the NGO – Basic Rights Counsel Initiative<sup>21</sup> - have rescued numerous children who have suffered horrific forms of abuse after being accused by parents and pastors of witchcraft. Like numerous other groups and individuals, their frontline work to challenge the beliefs and practices of those who use religion to justify witch-hunts against vulnerable children remains an inspiration to members of WHRIN. It also provides hope that more effective solutions may be developed in the future.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Even on the basis of limited, anecdotal evidence, this brief research exercise sheds light upon the potential extent and severity of the consequences of beliefs in and accusations of witchcraft, black magic or other malevolent spirits. Such beliefs, and subsequent human rights violations, exist throughout the world and are likely to affect the lives of many thousands of people. However, they need to be better understood and addressed within specific local cultural contexts. If this survey inspires more and better research and more and better efforts to protect individuals, then its aim will have been fulfilled.

There can be no doubt that the violence carried out due to these beliefs constitutes a serious violation of human rights. It disproportionately affects those who are already vulnerable, by virtue of their social status, to abuse and exploitation. In most cases the violence seems leaderless, unstoppable and leads to the death of the victims. Mercy is not shown to the elderly or small children who may be attacked as witches, as harbouring evil spirits or to use their body parts for magic or sacrifices to deities. The positive interventions that are being

<sup>20</sup> Available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/ACstartsstudyontherightsofpersonswithalbinism.aspx>

<sup>21</sup> See <http://basicrightscounsel.org/>

carried out to combat such human rights violations provide a small hope that long-term solutions to these problems may be developed. However they need to be better documented and evaluated so that learning can be shared with others across the world.

The report also shows that the nature of the beliefs that provoke violence varies from place to place, although, considering the world as a whole, a belief in witchcraft is the commonest motive for violence. The violence, even severe forms of it, may be controllable and does stop short of killing in some places as the example of Nepal shows. This leads to the important further conclusion that attempts to prevent this form of violation of human rights must be flexible, able to adapt to local circumstances, and should not depend on finding the same events and the same causes everywhere.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

While such issues as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child soldiers have been banned and have seen substantial funds invested in developing interventions to combat them, witchcraft accusations and persecution has slid beneath the radar.

The fact that this issue is closely tied with religious beliefs and practices means that many in the international community are fearful to be seen contravening article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. This article guarantees freedom of belief, conscience, and religion. However, this does not guarantee the right to make belief the cause of harm to others - this right does not supersede other human rights such as the right to life, which is being violated daily across the world—largely because of the belief in witchcraft.

There is little awareness of the potential scale of violent abuses of human rights caused by WAP and other malevolent spiritual beliefs at the international level. When made aware of this problem, many people remain incredulous that such practices can be happening in the 21st Century. There also remains a degree of belief in the power of witchcraft and malevolent magic in people from all cultures and backgrounds, which also remains a potential blockage to progress, if not acknowledged:

We believe that there is a need for greater awareness and understanding, greater engagement, and holistic solutions to end the human rights abuses associated with WAP, and that the UN can play a crucial role in this. We therefore call for:

- **Country Visits and Reports:** The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief and the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions are encouraged to ensure that considerations of WAP, and evidence of human rights abuses caused by WAP, are included in their country visits and reports
- **Public Statements:** The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights are encouraged to make more public statements on the issue of WAP and human rights abuses to challenge perceptions and create more awareness
- **Media Engagement:** The media need to be engaged constructively to play a key role in raising awareness and challenge perceptions in a non-sensationalised manner
- **Mainstreaming of Issue:** WAP needs to be treated as an emerging human rights issue and should be mainstreamed into discourses on Harmful Traditional Practices and Violence against Women and Children;
- **Research:** The UN should build on the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' initial report on the issue of WAP and Persons Affected by Albinism, by hosting a Geneva based Expert Consultation to encourage better collaboration and engagement of cross-sector stakeholders (including UN agencies, Government representatives, academics, NGOs, and faith groups) and collate evidence which can be compiled into an authoritative 2014 Global Report on incidences of WAP
- **Resolution:** Resolution: The UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly should build on the initial Resolutions condemning WAP of people with albinism and draft a Resolution calling for the end of WAP and prosecution of those responsible for such human rights abuses

hunt for a  
'witch' housemaid

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THREE APPEAR  
FOR 6-YEAR-OLD'S  
'MUTI' MURDER

Cape Town - Three men appeared in  
the Western Cape High Court on



Feb 14, 2013

# MAN ARRESTED FOR SACRIFICING OWN CHILD

The Police in Katwe have arrested a man who abducted his own child for ritual sacrifice

By Ronald Mubiru

The Police in Katwe have arrested a man who abducted his own child for ritual sacrifice.

The two-months old boy, Akram, whose dismembered body was discovered in a bush two days after his disappearance, was abducted the night of



WITCH H  
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IN FOUR Y

KATHMANDU, DEC 27

# WOMAN KILLED OVER 'WITCHCRAFT' IN CAPITAL

Body buried in a two feet pit on the ground floor of his house.

Manish Gautam

A woman was murdered over witchcraft accusation in the Capital. Basanti Maharjan, 42, was found murdered and buried in the house of her brother-in-law on Tuesday night, four days after she was reported missing.

Police recovered the dead body after H Bahadur himself reported the crime. H Bahadur had told the police that a foul smell was emanating from the ground where his brother had asked him to dig a pit a few days before Basanti went missing.

Monday, January 7th 201

# UNKIND END FOR SUSPECTED WITCH

Mkapuni Village in Kilifi County became abuzz and privates were discovered lying at the

Mkapuni Village in Kilifi County became abuzz when a man's privates were discovered lying at the open air market. Advertisement The severed organ caused shock and fear within the market as it was known where it was from and to

Mother, 20, accused of being a 'witch' who with sorcery' tortured a  
of tyres



**WHRIN**  
THE WITCHCRAFT & HUMAN RIGHTS  
INFORMATION NETWORK

Awareness.  
Understanding.  
Solutions.

The Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN) is a Community Interest Company (Company No.8281077), which means that we operate on a not-for-profit basis. Any profits that we make will be reinvested into developing WHRIN and supporting community level campaigns around the world to eradicate witchcraft accusations.

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WHRIN

headed on  
witchcraft

A forty-year-old man, John Friday Akpan, from Akwa Ibom  
resident in Calabar, the Cross River  
police