



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

Awareness.  
Understanding.  
Solutions.

## Witchcraft Accusations and Persecution; Muti Murders and Human Sacrifice:

Harmful Beliefs and Practices Behind  
a Global Crisis in Human Rights



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



## CONTENTS PAGE

---

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Background	3
3.	Understanding terminology	4
4.	UN Responses to Date	5
5.	2016 Study into Online Reports of Abuse	8
5.1	Study Findings	8
5.2	Numbers of Cases Recorded by Country	9
5.3	2016 Documented Cases: By Issues	9
6.	Emerging Trends	10
6.1	Misconceptions of Public Health Conditions	10
6.2	The Rise of the ‘Supernatural Entrepreneur’	11
6.21	Faith Leaders and Deliverers of Evil	11
6.22	Witchdoctors and Purveyors of Black Magic	13
6.23	Opportunists and fraudsters	15
6.24	Human Sacrifice on the Rise	15
6.3	Refugees and Asylum	16
6.4	Human Trafficking and Juju	17
6.5	The Role of Nollywood in Promoting Harmful Beliefs and Practices	18
6.6	The Challenge with Implementing New Legislation	19
6.7	Inactive Action Plans	21
7.	Successes and Signs of Hope	23
7.1	PWA in Tanzania and Malawi	23
7.2	A War against witch-doctors in Sierra Leone	24
7.3	Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and Other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act.	25
8.	Conclusion	25
9.	Recommendations	26

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

WHRIN wishes to express our sincere thanks to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the key role that they have played in hosting the Expert Workshop on Witchcraft and Human Rights. The sponsorship for the event by the Permanent Missions to the UN in Geneva of Portugal, UK, Sierra Leone, Israel and Canada is appreciated. Our co-organisers for the event - Ms I.K. Ero and Dr Charlotte Baker deserve thanks for their great commitment and perseverance, as does Peter Ash from Under the Same Sun for his kindness and generosity.

A number of volunteers have helped in producing this report – Brenna Dilley, Christiann MacClean, Anna Lautenberg and Olivia Figueiredo. WHRIN wishes them all well with their future endeavours. WHRIN advisory board member, Leo Igwe, James Ibor, Prof. Jean la Fontaine, Leethen Bartholomew, Madeleine Bridgett and Louise Meincke continue to encourage and inspire our work. Thanks also to Laurie Smith for the letters of support.

Finally, we wish to thank all the NGOs, activists, academics, survivors and policy makers that make up the Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network, without whose work, there would be no lights burning in the darkness.

Author: Gary Foxcroft, Executive Director, WHRIN

### 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.



Awareness.  
Understanding.  
Solutions.

# Witchcraft Accusations and Persecution; Muti Murders and Human Sacrifice:

Harmful Beliefs and Practices Behind  
a Global Crisis in Human Rights

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been specifically compiled for the United Nations Expert Workshop on Witchcraft and Human Rights, in Geneva on 21st and 22nd September 2017. It aims to provide some background understanding into the work carried out by the United Nations on these issues to date; outline the current scale of the abuses of human rights that are taking place across the world due such harmful beliefs and practices; identify emerging trends and, finally, act as a call to action for all UN, Government and civil society agencies working on these issues to redouble their efforts to develop solutions to prevent further abuses from taking place.

## 2. BACKGROUND

In numerous countries around the world, harmful witchcraft related beliefs and practices have resulted in serious violations of human rights including, beatings, banishment, cutting of body parts, and amputation of limbs, torture and murder. Women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, such as persons with albinism, are particularly vulnerable. Despite the seriousness of these human rights abuses, there is often no robust state led response. Often judicial systems do not act to prevent, investigate or prosecute human rights abuses linked to beliefs in witchcraft. Beliefs and practices related to witchcraft vary considerably between different countries and even within ethnicities in the same country. There is overall limited understanding of beliefs in witchcraft, how it may be practised in some cultures, and why. Currently, no normative framework or formal mechanism exists to conceptualize record, monitor or respond to such violations.

The exact numbers of victims of such abuses is unknown and is widely believed to be underreported. At the very least, it is believed that there are thousands of cases of people accused of witchcraft each year globally, often with fatal consequences, and others are mutilated and killed for witchcraft-related rituals. The literature asserts that these numbers are increasing, with cases becoming more violent, the practices spreading, and new classes of victims being created although the difficulty in proving such claims quantitatively is acknowledged

“It is a bit like a virus coming into an area which doesn't have a resistance to a virus. It just goes through like bushfire and that's what happening in some places which have no real cultural mechanisms to deal with that...we are going to have to find ways to deal with it at the social level, cultural level, belief level and so on because this is something new.”

Father Phillip Gibbs - Papua New Guinea



### 3. UNDERSTANDING TERMINOLOGY

It is WHRIN's position that confusion with the terminology used in working on these issues acts as a significant hindrance to promoting greater awareness and understanding of these issues.

As such, in order for greater progress to be made with understanding mainstreaming the issues that the Expert Workshop on Witchcraft and Human Rights focuses on, WHRIN believes that there is a need for greater discussion and broader understanding of what constitutes "witchcraft". The challenges inherent in doing so were clearly highlighted in 2009 by the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Philip Alston, stated that human rights abuses carried out due to beliefs in witchcraft have "not featured prominently on the radar screen of human rights monitors" and that "this may be due partly to the difficulty of defining 'witches' and 'witchcraft' across cultures - terms that, quite apart from their connotations in popular culture, may include an array of traditional or faith healing practices and are not easily defined. "<sup>1</sup>

WHRIN's position on our understanding of terminology is captured below in order to provide a greater insight for the reader.

**What is witchcraft?** 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?** 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.

**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>2</sup> witchcraft allegations,<sup>3</sup> witchcraft branding, 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> OHCHR. Witches in the 21st Century (2009) Available at - <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Witches21stCentury.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> HelpAge USA (2012) - Available at <http://www.helpageusa.org/what-we-do/older-women/older-womens-rights/fighting-witchcraft-accusations/>

<sup>3</sup> European Parliament (2013) Child Witchcraft Allegations and Human Rights Available at - [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/433714/EXPO-DROI\\_NT%282013%29433714\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/433714/EXPO-DROI_NT%282013%29433714_EN.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Stepping Stones Nigeria, Witchcraft Stigmatisation and Children's Rights in Nigeria Report prepared for the 54th Session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2010) Available at - [www.crin.org/en/.../UNCRC%20Shadow%20Report%20SSN%20FINAL%20171209.doc](http://www.crin.org/en/.../UNCRC%20Shadow%20Report%20SSN%20FINAL%20171209.doc)

<sup>5</sup> Miller, N. Encounters with Witchcraft (2012).

<sup>6</sup> Age International. Why Does Witchcraft-related Abuse of Older People Still Happen in 2016? Available at - [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/chris-roles/why-does-witchcraftrelate\\_b\\_9399576.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/chris-roles/why-does-witchcraftrelate_b_9399576.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, this harmful belief and practice, which makes up the majority of the cases of abuse that this report focuses on, has no clearly defined terminology. For this reason, WHRIN uses the term “Witchcraft Accusations and Persecution” (WAP), which we believe captures the real nuances of this belief and practice more effectively.

**What is spirit possession?** 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. In Islam, these are known as “jinn”. However, 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?** 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 a muti murder?** 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. Such killings are widely reported as “ritual killings”. However, little evidence exists to show that there is any significant ritual involved in making the magic. Hence, why WHRIN currently refers to them as muti murders.

**What is human sacrifice?** 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. Today, it is most prevalent in parts of Asia, most notably India and Nepal.

## 4. UN Responses to date

The UN Witchcraft and Human Rights Expert workshop is ground-breaking as it is the first-ever to discuss witchcraft and human rights in a systematic and in-depth manner at the UN or international level. However, it is important to understand that this is not the first time that these issues have been identified by UN bodies as an emerging human rights concern.

Witchcraft beliefs, practices and related consequences have been reported in the UN by various high level officials and experts—although from a specific perspective and often in a specific country and context. These include the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) on Violence against Children, the Special Rapporteur (SR) on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the SR on freedom of religion or belief, the SR on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and the SR on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. Some experts have also sent communications to states on the matter including the SR on the independence of judges and lawyers, as well as the Independent expert on technical cooperation and advisory services in Liberia.

The main UN body to have initiated research on these issues was the UNHCR whose Policy Development and Evaluation Service commissioned a report by Jill Schoebelen, which was released in January 2009. “Witchcraft allegations, refugee protection and human rights: a review of the evidence”,<sup>7</sup> proved to be a seminal piece of work on the issues and contributed to greater awareness and further UNHCR media advocacy being carried out on the issue.

---

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, Witchcraft allegations, refugee protection and human rights: a review of the evidence (2009)  
Available at - <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/research/working/4981ca712/witchcraft-allegations-refugee-protection-human-rights-review-evidence.html>

In May 2009, Philip Alston, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, made witchcraft a priority in his annual report. He considered witchcraft to be an issue of particular importance because there had been numerous cases in which those accused of witchcraft had been persecuted and killed. He identified the lack of information and attention given to this issue and acknowledges that in many countries the numbers, scope and patterns of killings remain unknown. In August 2009, Alston, in his report to the Human Rights Council, stated that: "In too many settings, being classified as a witch is tantamount to receiving a death sentence." Alston concluded: "The persecution and killing of individuals accused of practicing so-called "witchcraft" – the vast majority of whom are women and children – is a significant phenomenon in many parts of the world."

Following on from this, the UNHCR then organised a side event at the UN Human Rights Council on 23rd September 2009. Jeff Crisp, head of the UNHCR's Policy Development and Evaluation Service, noted that in some countries, "accusations of witchcraft constitute some of the most serious refugee protection problems encountered by UNHCR". "Killing of women, child "witches" on rise, U.N. told" - reported Reuters following the event.

In April 2010 Aleksandra Cimpric was commissioned by UNICEF to produce a report on how belief in witchcraft impacted on children's enjoyment of their rights. "Children Accused of Witchcraft An anthropological study of contemporary practices in Africa" - addressed the issue of children who are victims of violence and mistreatment due to local beliefs, representations and practices, in particular, relating to witchcraft.

In response to growing concern within UNHCR around the issue of children being accused of witchcraft within the refugee and IDP communities, which fall under the UNHCR mandate and the abuse that they receive as a consequence UNHCR's Policy and Evaluation section commissioned another report to research the issue in more depth and to provide recommendations based on the results of their findings. "Breaking the spell: responding to witchcraft accusations against children". Amongst other things, the report recommended that: "UNHCR, UNICEF, immigration departments, INGOs and local NGOs share their experiences in order to foster mutual learning about how to approach and respond to cases of children who are victims of witchcraft accusations or those who require assistance because of fear of retribution".



A further side event was held on the fringes of the Human Rights Council in March 2014 by the Women's UN Report Network. Entitled "Violence Against Children Accused of Witchcraft", the event brought stakeholders together from across the world to discuss these issues. According to the statement by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Martha Santos Pais: "The growing reality of children being accused of witchcraft reveals a serious pattern of discrimination, social exclusion, violence, abandonment and sometimes even murder of innocent children.... Beyond branding a child as a witch, in itself a form of psychological violence, these accusations often lead to physical attacks against these children and other extreme human rights violations....In today's globalizing world, reports of witchcraft incidents are gaining increasing visibility across regions. Either in Sub-Saharan Africa, in Asia, in the Pacific and beyond, this phenomenon is systematically associated with serious acts of violence, starvation, abandonment and death.....As a result of all these factors, incidences of violence against children accused of witchcraft are rarely reported. They remain concealed and associated with a culture of impunity and tolerance of violence, with no opportunity for redress for child victims."

The Women's UN Report Network followed up there 2014 side event, with another one in March 2015, this time at the UN Commission on the Status of Women Session 59, in New York City.

In June 2015, the Human Rights Council appointed Ms. Ikponwosa Ero as the first Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism (PWA). Persons with albinism are a unique group whose human rights issues have generally gone unnoticed for centuries; the result being deeply engrained stigma,





discrimination and violence against them across various countries. Amongst other, wider issues of discrimination against PWA, Ms Ero has been particularly concerned with how the lives of PWA are affected by harmful beliefs and practices, violence including killings and ritual attacks, trade and trafficking of body parts for witchcraft purposes, infanticide and abandonment of children.

Ms Ero has broached the topic of the body parts of PWA being used in “witchcraft” rituals in her last two reports, and considers that a more holistic approach to the phenomena is necessary. In March 2016, together with the United Nations International Crime and Research Institute (UNICRI), she organised a side event at the UN Human Rights Council, Geneva to address the root causes of attacks against PWA.

Finally, on last year’s Elder Abuse Awareness Day on 15 June 2016, the UN Secretary General spoke out on the issue:” Abuse of older women often follows a lifetime of discrimination, violence and oppression. I am particularly alarmed by growing reports of older women who are accused of witchcraft, making them targets of abuse from their own families and communities,” Mr. Ban said.

The fact that human rights abuses linked to beliefs in witchcraft has been acknowledged as a critical issue by so many UN agencies and senior officials, going back at least 8 years to since 2009, therefore further highlights the importance of the UN Expert Workshop on Witchcraft and Human Rights in September 2017. Importantly, it also highlights the critical need for the workshop to mark the starting point of a wider, more systemic engagement with the issue by the United Nations and one that leads to positive action being taken across all UN bodies to address the issues.



© Vlad Sokhin  
www.vladsokhin.com

Elderly woman accused of witchcraft in Papua New Guinea

## 5. 2016 STUDY INTO ONLINE REPORTS OF ABUSE

In order to present the UN bodies and participants at the Expert Workshop on Witchcraft and Human Rights with more up-to-date information about the issues explored in the event, WHRIN systematically documented online media reports of violence resulting from beliefs in witchcraft and other malevolent spiritual beliefs in 2016. Reports were included if they involved: witchcraft (belief in human use of spiritual powers to cause harm), use of body parts in magic (muti), human sacrifice and other human rights abuses linked to beliefs such as those in spirit possession and juju. 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 2016. The study follows on from a similar one carried out by WHRIN in 2013, entitled “21st Century Witchcraft Accusations and Persecution”, which was presented at a side event at the UN Human Rights Council in 2014.

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. For example, in countries such as Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola, where English is not widely spoken and where widespread abuses of human rights have been reported due to such beliefs and practices, only two cases were recorded.

Additionally, the secrecy and fear that surround such harmful beliefs and practices 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. 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.

### 5.1 Study Findings

A total of 398 reports were documented from 49 countries. This was an increase from 282 and 41 respectively in 2013, thereby representing a 41% and 20% increase from the 2013 study results.

Witchcraft beliefs and practices were reported in every continent and were associated with high-levels of violence. The highest number of reports came from the African continent clustered in particular regions or states, including Nigeria (67), Zimbabwe (29) and South Africa (28).

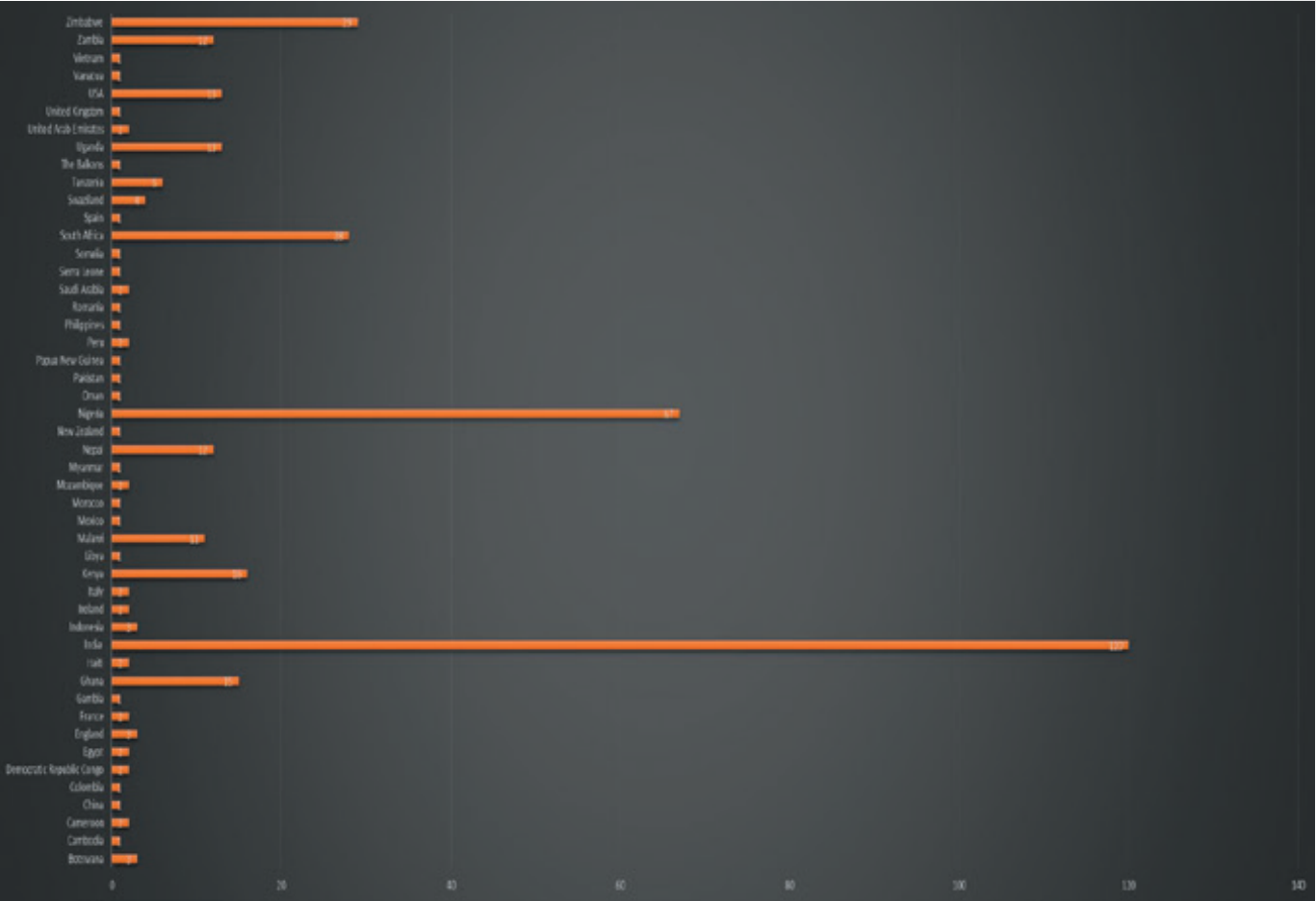
In Asia, the largest number of reports come from India where 120 cases were recorded, against just 63 in 2013. Thirty-five of these cases were of human sacrifice, most usually of children. Nepal also has a relatively high concentration of recorded cases (12).

In Europe, there were a small number of cases recorded in England (3), France (2) and Serbia (the Balkans) (1). Again, as with other cases, we know that this presents a limited picture of the true scale of the challenge in each of these countries. For example, WHRIN alone supported 4 cases of children being accused of witchcraft in the UK in 2016 and the Metropolitan police have recorded many more cases.

America recorded 11 cases of abuses, which were linked to a wide variety of beliefs, ranging from the power of voodoo to Pagan Witchcraft. There is also a suggestion in some of the reports that there has been a rise in cases related to “Satanic Panic” where people are brainwashed by psychiatrists to believe that they have participated to satanic rituals and caused all manner of evil. Such beliefs and claims rose to prominence in the UK in the 1990’s were discredited by WHRIN advisory, Prof. Jean La Fontaine in her work.



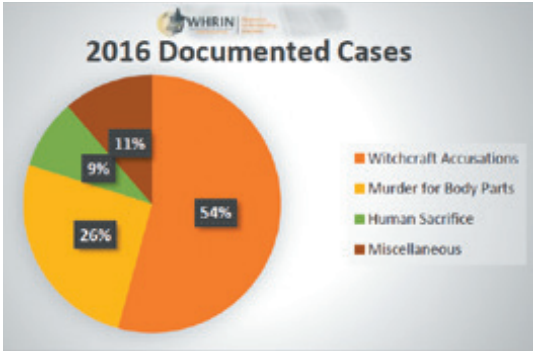
## 5.2 Numbers of Cases Recorded by Country



## 5.3 2016 Documented Cases: By Issues

Abuses of human rights brought about by beliefs in witchcraft constituted the majority of recorded cases in 2016. Based on the prevalence of the literature on this issue, this came as no surprise to WHRIN. What did though were the high levels of cases of muti murders, for body parts, and also the significant levels of cases of human sacrifice, almost exclusively in India. Relatively little attention has been paid to these two issues in recent years and this data suggests that they are two emerging challenges that need more research carrying out on if solutions are to be developed to prevent further increases in cases being recorded.

Overall, the large increase in cases recorded, when compared to 2013 data is of great concern to WHRIN. Whilst this could be brought about by a large number of factors, such as increased awareness of the issues, access to technology and wider understanding of human rights, the study mainly supports the views of activists, faith leaders and policy makers on the ground, that there is a growing crisis in human rights taking place around the world related to harmful witchcraft beliefs and practices.



Types of Cases	Number of Cases
Witchcraft Accusations	216
Murder for Body Parts	102
Human Sacrifice	35
Miscellaneous	45
Total Number:	398

## 6. EMERGING TRENDS

In order to support greater understanding of the key emerging trends recorded in the 2016 documented cases, WHRIN has identified a number of issues that will require more research if solutions are to be developed to prevent the spread of the “virus” of harmful witchcraft beliefs and practices from spreading to new parts of the world.

### 6.1 Public Health Issues Affecting Witchcraft Accusations and Persecution

Belief in witchcraft can be conceptualized as an attempt by people to rationalize the misfortunes occurring in their life; it shapes perceptions and provides an answer when disaster strikes. “Unexpected hardship or bad luck, sudden and incurable diseases, all can be accounted to the actions of evil people, to magical forces...the diagnosis of witchcraft opens up the possibility of combating the causes of hardship.” Put simply it provides an explanation for what would be otherwise unexplainable or unbearable.

WHRIN’s 2016 research highlights how the majority of cases of WAP around the world are triggered by a public health condition. This condition often leads to a community member becoming ill or dying. The wider family and community members then often blame a vulnerable member of the community for this misfortune and accuse them of being a witch and therefore causing the illness or death.

**August 2016, Enugu State, Nigeria** – “Woman Cages 4-year-old girl in the Bush for 5 Months | Says she suspected the child was a witch and had HIV” - The suspect caged the victim because of her swollen legs, suspecting that she was HIV positive, hence the need to keep her away from the public to avoid the spread of the virus in the community. “I would have taken her to the hospital for treatment but I had no money to pay for the medical bills,” she said.

public health conditions themselves are also particularly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations and persecution. Conditions such as autism, HIV/AIDS, down’s syndrome, albinism and mental health problems are routinely considered as signs of witchcraft, such are the low levels of public awareness of the rational, scientific explanation of such beliefs.

Vulnerabilities of people with public health conditions to witchcraft accusations and persecution is further compounded by lack of access to medical facilities in many parts of the world. For example “across Melanesia, health systems are routinely decried as in decline and for rural populations, primary health care has effectively been

#### **Feb, 2016 - Assam State, India**

“Villagers Killed for Practicing Witchcraft” – Two persons killed and one seriously injured by a village mob in a suspected case of witch-hunting. Villagers consulted the local quack (witchdoctor) after their family members were afflicted by diseases. According to locals, the quack told the villagers that the cause of diseases were due to witchcraft.



#### **September 2016, Maharashtra, India.**

“Anguish of ‘snake’ children branded witches by frightened locals because of their skin condition” Sayali Kapese and her brother were segregated at school and branded witches and ghosts by locals frightened by their appearance. The condition they suffer from - Lamellar Ichthyosis - means that they shed their skin every 3 days, and this has led locals to believe that they are witches”.

withdrawn .....This national decline in access to medical services also implies a corresponding decline in access to authoritative biomedical explanations of sickness and death, allowing sorcery-based explanations to hold sway.”<sup>8</sup>

Despite the clear links that exist between understandings of public health conditions and cases of WAP, there appears to be a real dearth of research that has been carried out into this important field of work. Academics, health practitioners, NGOs and the World Health Organisation clearly need to do more to bridge this gap in understanding.

## 6.2 The Rise of the ‘Supernatural Entrepreneur’

An assessment of the 2016 documented cases highlights the links of many of the cases to “middlemen or women” who act as conduit between those who carry out human rights violations and the victims themselves, and who use some form of belief in the supernatural to facilitate the abuse. Such individuals have been called “Supernatural Entrepreneurs” by WHRIN advisory board member, Professor Jean la Fontaine, and his term can be used to capture the three main subgroups of people behind the abuse.

### 6.21 The Faith Leader

Some faith leaders, most notably pastors in African Pentecostal churches, continue to promote the belief in witchcraft, and their ability to cleanse or “deliver” people from it, in order to empower and enrich themselves. The purported capacity to deliver people from the power of witches can generate huge earnings for pastor-prophets who engage in deliverance sessions. Research shows that those religious leaders encourage congregants to repeatedly attend



Pastor in Pentecostal Church Carrying Out Deliverance of a Child

church programmes, pay tithes regularly and give offerings and vows, all with the aim of generating more and more income from their followers.

Children are the primary targets of such pastors, and academics have widely noted that the boom in revivalist churches is undoubtedly closely related to the accusations of witchcraft against children. Following an accusation, a pastor will usually be paid to ‘deliver’ the child,

usually by means of an exorcism or deliverance ceremony which is often violent or abusive. Children accused of witchcraft regularly suffer some of the most severe forms of abuse at the hands of such pastors including being confined to the church grounds for months on end, often with little food and water; undergoing long, and sometimes violent, deliverance ceremonies; lack of access to basic sanitation; and being forced to drink dangerous substances in order to purge themselves of the perceived evil.



<sup>8</sup> Miranda Forsyth and Richard Eves (2015) Talking it Through. Responses to Sorcery and Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices in Melanesia. Available at - [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt169wd7b](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt169wd7b)



Perhaps the most renowned example of such a supernatural entrepreneur is the Nigerian pastor -Helen Ukpabio - who has built the Liberty Gospel church around her brand of being able to identify and deliver people, most notably, children from witchcraft. Ukpabio employs Nollywood films, literature, and music to sell her vision of an evil world where misfortune and suffering awaits those who do not engage in spiritual warfare and, of course, make offerings to her ever-growing church. Ukpabio's publications are obsessed with demons, mermaid spirits, and the omnipresent threat of witchcraft. According to her: "There is hardly any family without witchcraft possession or attack—with many held in deep fear of witchcraft operations."



Despite large-scale international attention of her activities, and being deported from the UK due to preaching about witchcraft, Ukpabio continues to deliver a large number of “special warfare programmes” each year, which offer “deliverance from difficult witchcraft attacks”. Various NGO and UN reports highlight the link between Helen Ukpabio’s church and the epidemic of child witchcraft accusations in south-east Nigeria, yet she continues to preach widely on the issue across the country.

### June 2016, Calabar, Nigeria

“Calabar Pastor Ties Children To Tree, Assault Them With Machete Over Alleged Witchcraft” - Two children age, 10 and 7, were this morning, rescued from being murdered by some members of Divine Zion of God Church....Led by one Prophet David Effiom Zion and some members of their family, the children were accused by their cousin of being witches and allegedly snatching her baby in a dream....the children were taken to the forest, tied to a tree, battered and assaulted with a machete by some members of the family, leaving them with cuts and bruises all over their bodies.

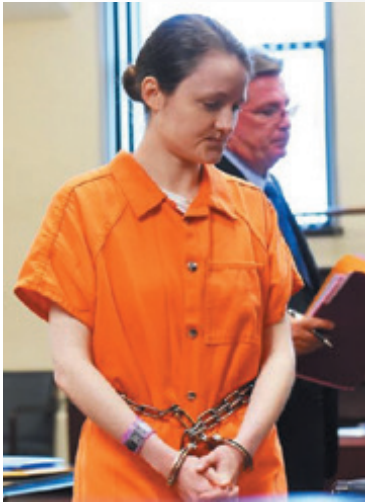
### October 2016 - Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

“Allegation of witchcraft practice: Two children, a good Samaritan banished from homes” Blessing Bassey attended a prayer session on a Friday night after her two siblings were kidnapped by unknown gunmen. One of the Pastors in a small church denounced her as using her magic power to cause the kidnapping of her two siblings and causing the family to go broke. Things changed for the worst that fateful day and her parents began a string of torture on her every night before she was finally sent out the house.

### June 2016, Sukkur, Pakistan

A woman in her early 20s succumbed to injuries at Civil Hospital, Karachi, after having been allegedly tortured by a fake faith healer (pir) in Khairpur district. The pir declared that she had been possessed by a jinn and tortured her, due to which, she went into coma and finally lost her life.

Children are not the only group most at risk of witchcraft accusations by Christian pastors, and there are a number of other cases where women have been accused of witchcraft. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that it is not only in Africa where such pastors operate and where their teachings lead to abuses taking place.



### January 2016, New York, USA

“Pastor accused teens of sex abuse, witchcraft” - The pastor of a small church where two brothers were beaten for hours during a counselling session that she called pleaded guilty on Friday to manslaughter and assault. Three other church members admitted to less serious charges for their roles in the all-night beatings that killed Lucas Leonard, 19, and injured Christopher Leonard, 17. The circumstances that led to the death of 19-year-old Lucas Leonard took “hours and hours” to play out. The counselling session that led to the teens’ injuries was organized by church Pastor Tiffanie Irwin where the teens were accused of “numerous sins,” including having practiced witchcraft”

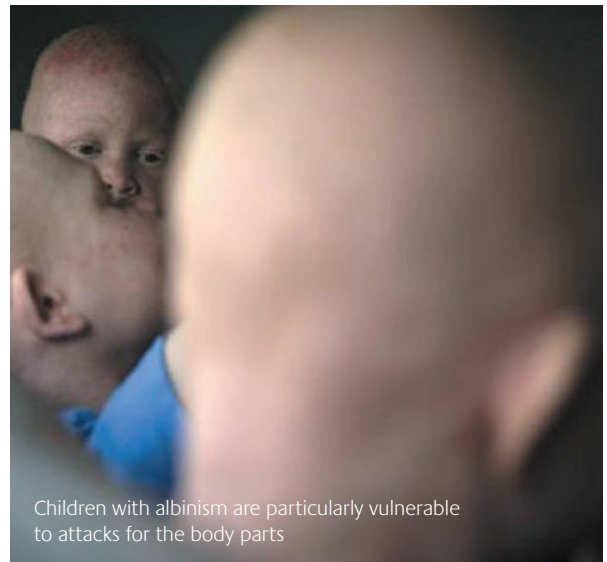
Whilst the majority of such cases of abuse relate to Christian faith leaders, a small handful of cases linked to Islamic faith leaders were also recorded in Pakistan, Ghana and Malawi. Islamic State beheaded a 100 year old man for “witchcraft” in June 2016<sup>9</sup>



## 6.22 The Witchdoctor

One of the key findings from analysing the 2016 documented cases is the high percentage (26%) of cases relating to the killings of people for their body parts for black magic, which are referred to as “muti murders” in this report. The role of witchdoctors or traditional healers as the supernatural entrepreneur that provides this magic fuels this crisis, therefore clearly requires greater understanding if this practice is to be eradicated.

The demand for muti, or juju as it is known in Nigeria, is driven by individuals or group of individuals who seek to enrich or empower themselves in the spheres of business, politics, money or sex. They then commission the witchdoctor to assist them by concocting the magic and a human victim is identified for murder in order to create the ‘medicine’ or black magic. The perpetrators are usually men, although women have been convicted as well. Perpetrators vary widely in age and social status. 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.



Children with albinism are particularly vulnerable to attacks for the body parts

<sup>9</sup> Available at - <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2228061/murderous-isis-behead-elderly-cleric-aged-100-for-witchcraft/>



Victims vary widely in age and social standing. They are often young children since the belief is that their bodies contain stronger magical powers, and are both male and female. In some instances, the victim is identified and ‘purchased’ via a transaction involving an often nominal amount of money. The victim is then abducted, often at night, and taken to an isolated place, often in the open countryside if the murder is being committed in a rural area. It is usually intended that the victim be mutilated while conscious, so that the medicine can be made more potent through the noises of the victim in agony. Mutilation does not take place in order to kill the victim, but it is expected that the victim will die of the wounds

Body parts cut mostly include soft tissue – eyelids, lips, scrota, labia – although there have been instances where entire limbs and heads have been severed. Differing body parts of Persons with Albinism (PWA) are believed to be especially powerful and this has seen a number of cases of murders take place in 2016, most notably in Malawi. For example, the hair of PWA may be woven into fishing nets or arms, legs, skin, eyes, genitals, and blood may be used in other forms of magic. These body parts are removed to be mixed with medicinal plants to create a medicine through a cooking process. The resulting medicine is sometimes consumed, but is often made into a paste that is carried on the person of the perpetrator or rubbed onto the body.

In Swaziland, such harmful beliefs and practices have led to calls from traditional leaders such as Chief Mshikashika Ngcamphalala for greater action to prevent further abuses. In particular, the chief challenged traditional healers and called upon them to stand up against ritual murders, which normally escalate during times of elections. Ngcamphalala said traditional authorities were concerned about reports of people having mysteriously disappeared, where some of them would be recovered dead and with missing body parts. He said it was no secret that in many instances, traditional healers, or rather witchdoctors, would be linked with the killings.<sup>11</sup>



### September 2016, Bauchi State, Nigeria

19-year-old Nigerian boy is recuperating in Bauchi City hospital after his eyes were gouged out by people who reportedly wanted them for witchcraft rituals.



Body parts seized in Nigeria<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Available at - <http://www.jerkzones.com/2016/09/four-men-arrested-for-killing-and.html>

<sup>11</sup> Available at - <https://www.pressreader.com/swaziland/swazi-observer/20170605/281685434811240>



## 6.23 Fraudsters and Opportunists

A number of cases were recorded where individuals appear to use beliefs in the witchcraft, or evil spirits, to dupe people out of large amounts of money, or possessions. For example in India, cases were recorded where “self proclaimed Godmen” have duped people out of money on the pretext of helping to ward off the ‘evil spirits’ causing problems in people’s family life. In New Zealand and Canada authorities identified a number of Indian-origin ‘witch doctors’ involved in duping numerous vulnerable people, including those from the Indian community, of thousands of dollars.

In Zimbabwe in December 2016, self-styled prophets were reported to be on the rampage in rural areas where they are extorting unsuspecting villagers of their valued stock as payment for cleansing ceremonies in their homes. A team of law enforcement agents was dispatched in the country’s 10 provinces to curb the fraudulent operations of self-proclaimed witch hunters (tsikamutandas), a senior police official said. The decision came after last week’s cabinet pronouncement that the tsikamutandas are not licensed by Government to conduct such ‘criminal, fraudulent and extortionist activities’.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, a case in Romania was documented that further highlights the geographical scope of the cases of this form of supernatural entrepreneur. According to local media reports, two women were sentenced to probation for blackmail having advertised themselves as witches and fortune-tellers in the media and offering their witchcraft services to people who needed them. The two so-called witches identified wealthy public personalities who had various problems. They would call those people and tell them that their problems were the result of spells ordered by their enemies.<sup>13</sup>

## 6.24 Human Sacrifice



One of the most worrying trends that is identifiable in the 2016 cases is the prominence of cases of human sacrifice that are occurring, primarily in India. Whilst this is still one of the least common occurring form of abuse, it would appear that the number of reported cases are increasing, with 35 cases recorded in 2016.

Recorded cases point towards the key role that Tantrik priests play in these gruesome human rights violations. Tantrism is an amalgam of mystical practices that grew out of Hinduism, which has millions of followers across India, where it originated between



Advert for “Spiritual Healing” in India

<sup>12</sup> Available at - <http://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-national-byo-100941.html>

<sup>13</sup> Available at - <https://www.romania-insider.com/two-fortune-telling-witches-romania-sentenced-probation-blackmail/>

the fifth and ninth centuries. Tantrik priests are consulted on everything from marital to bowel problems. Such priests have a strong belief in the powers of the Hindu Goddess - Kali - who is known to bring riches to the poor, revenge to the oppressed and new-born joy to the childless. The death of a human being may be offered to the goddess for the person offering it to receive the benefits of health and good fortune. These sacrifices are performed with due ritual but the victims are usually members of the sacrificer's own family – often a child.



The Hindu Goddess – Kali

According to Sanal Edamaruku, president of the Indian Rationalist Association, human sacrifice affects most of northern India. 'Modern India is home to hundreds of millions who can't read or write, but who often seek refuge from life's realities through astrology or the magical arts of shamans. Unfortunately these people focus their horrific attention on society's weaker members, mainly women and children who are easier to handle and kidnap.'<sup>14</sup>



### August 2016, Nawalparasi district, Nepal

"11 suspects convicted of human sacrifice in Nawalparasi" - 11 people, who were accused of sacrificing a 10-year-old boy were found guilty of murder. Kodai Harijan kidnapped and murdered the minor boy in the name of sacrifice to a deity to ensure good health for his 18-year-old son, who was unwell. With a belief that human flesh would help his son get well, Kodai had slaughtered the boy with the help of three local shamans, who he had paid Rs 50,000 for the bloody rituals."<sup>15</sup>

Cases of human sacrifice have been recorded across various states in India, including Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh. In Assam, one of the most gruesome cases of human sacrifice recorded was of a four-year-old girl who was beheaded and her hands were chopped off by four people to appease a God and in order to retrieve the phone lost by the daughter of one of the accused.

## 6.3 Refugee and Asylum

In 2016 WHRIN witnessed a significant increase in requests from lawyers seeking expert witness reports in asylum cases in the UK. In total 9 cases were assisted, with 13 others being turned away due to lack of capacity. All cases involved a fear of witchcraft accusations and persecution or a fear of murder for body parts to be used in magic. Those accused of witchcraft, or at risk of such accusations, are not a well-recognised vulnerable group, and they do not accrue specially recognised rights as such. They do, however, benefit from human rights protections which are available to all people. Those who face persecution in this way may flee and seek protection in other countries, but their situation is precarious even in exile.

<sup>14</sup> Available at - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/mar/05/india.theobserver>

<sup>15</sup> Available at - <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/court-convicts-11-suspects-human-sacrifice-nawalparasi-village/>

Numerous difficulties arise, however, with making a successful asylum claim including the lack of awareness and understanding of such issues by lawyers, judges and wider social welfare practitioners. However, in some of the cases that WHRIN has assisted, judgement has been made in favour of the appellant who have claim fear of persecution due to witchcraft beliefs. For example, a judge in a case of a child with severe disabilities, whose mother was claiming asylum as a result of the fear of WAP against the child stated: “ It is abundantly clear to me from the evidence that the whole of the immediate family would be affected by the allegations of witchcraft to such an extent that they too would be at a real risk of persecutory conduct.”<sup>16</sup>

Others cases that WHRIN has successfully supported have highlighted the risk faced by children with albinism who fear persecution. For example, a case in December 2016, where the judge stated that: “The background evidence and expert evidence are consistent in showing; that albino people are the subject of widespread societal discrimination in areas such as education and employment and may often be ostracised by their families and the community. The evidence also shows that according to some cultural and belief systems in Nigeria albino people are believed to be endowed with certain powers. There are reports that some albinos have been kidnapped and killed for ritualistic purposes.”<sup>17</sup>

Given the prevalence of the belief in witchcraft and its potential to harm already vulnerable groups, it is important that human rights groups and refugee advocates expand their capacity to understand this phenomenon and monitor its implications.



**March 2016, Bradford, UK.** “Deportation-threatened Bradford student given leave to stay in UK for next three years” Campaigners are celebrating after a Bradford student with Down Syndrome who was threatened with deportation has been granted a three-year leave to stay in the UK. Memory Juma, 22, came to Bradford from her native Malawi ten years ago after facing prejudice in her village where she was kept indoors by her grandmother because of people's talk of witchcraft and of evil, according to her family. As she got older, she was called a "witch-child".

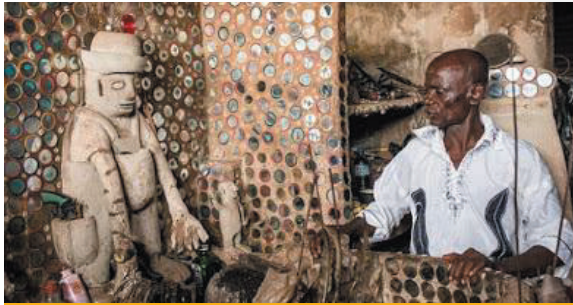
6.4 Human Trafficking and Juju

A steep rise in cases of human trafficking where juju was used as a tool to coerce the victims into compliance was reported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2016.<sup>18</sup> The problem was most prominently reported in Italy, Spain and the UK. The majority of cases came from Nigeria, with many of them being forced into prostitution.

Human traffickers (who primarily come from Edo and Delta States in Nigeria) use the cultural beliefs in Juju to blackmail their victims. Traditional priests are paid to carry out ceremonies where the victim is made to swear an oath of obedience to the trafficker. After this, such is the strength of belief, there is no need to lock up victims and have them watched. Although the controller will be many miles away the belief by the victim that she is being watched is so powerful she will feel compelled to comply with instructions, to do otherwise would risk death.

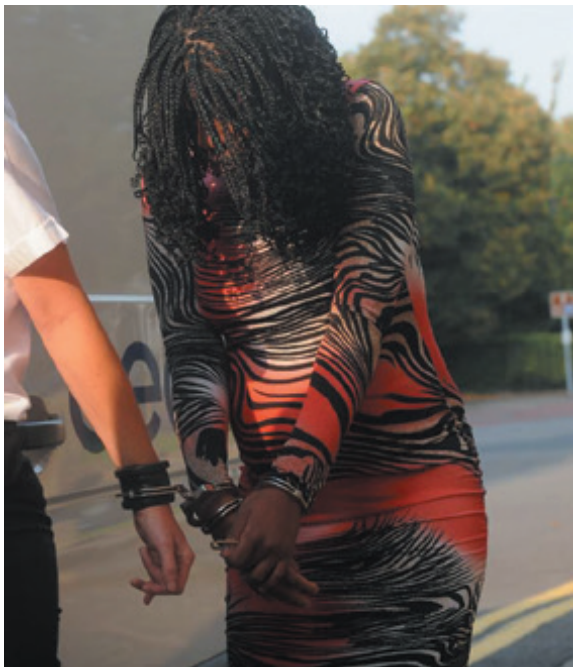
<sup>16</sup> Available at - <https://tribunalsdecisions.service.gov.uk/utiac/aa-05484-2015-ors>  
<sup>17</sup> Available at - <https://tribunalsdecisions.service.gov.uk/utiac/2016-ukut-560>  
<sup>18</sup> Available at - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/aug/08/trafficking-of-nigerian-women-into-prostitution-in-europe-at-crisis-level>





Nigerian victims of human trafficking are often forced to undergo juju rituals in shrines like this in Southern Nigeria

IOM officials in Italy have recorded a six-fold increase in the numbers of Nigerian women reaching their shores by sea in the last two years, with the majority - almost 80 percent - of the young women victims of trafficking. The new arrivals of trafficking victims are stretching the workload of the IOM, the U.N. refugee agency (UNHCR) and local charities, aid workers say. “It is reaching a stage where it is out of control,” said Margherita Limoni, a legal advisor with the IOM in Catania. Dozens of Nigerian men and women have been arrested in Italy in recent months on trafficking related charges, prosecutors say.<sup>19</sup>



### March 2016, Brighton, UK

“Voodoo sex trafficker tricked women to work in Brighton brothel under threat of “juju” magic - Lizzy Idahosa was jailed for 8 years for human trafficking. She had arranged for trafficking victims to see a Nigerian witchdoctor who made them take off their clothes and eat snakes and snails. They were then sent to Britain to have sex with up to eight strangers a day - working in brothels - in the belief the black magic curses would make them go insane or die if they refused. One victim told how a machete was used to cut the backs of her legs by the “juju man” who also used a razor on her body to mark her. The ritual was used to “ensure compliance, secrecy, and if broken dire consequences would follow - illness, madness, infertility or death”.

## 6.5 The Role of Nollywood in Promoting Harmful Beliefs and Practices

WHRIN, and other NGOs, have repeatedly called for more international attention to be focused on the key role that the Nigerian movie industry - Nollywood - plays in promoting beliefs in witchcraft and juju across Africa.<sup>21</sup> Such movies are widely watched across Africa, so much so that Nollywood surpassed Hollywood as the world’s second largest film producer in 2009.

The fact that around half of all such movies are made in English, significantly contributes to their wide appeal and may explain Nigeria’s success in exporting its films to other African countries and around the world. Another factors behind the huge success of Nollywood is that the majority of Nollywood movies have themes that deal with the moral



Nollywood films often promote beliefs in the power of witchcraft, juju and ritual killings. Little is understood about the impact of such films across Africa, despite calls from NGOs for more research.

<sup>19</sup> Available at - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/aug/08/trafficking-of-nigerian-women-into-prostitution-in-europe-at-crisis-level>

<sup>20</sup> Available at - [http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/14334251.Voodoo\\_sex\\_trafficker\\_tricked\\_women\\_to\\_work\\_in\\_Brighton\\_brothel\\_under\\_threat\\_of\\_juju\\_magic/](http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/14334251.Voodoo_sex_trafficker_tricked_women_to_work_in_Brighton_brothel_under_threat_of_juju_magic/)

<sup>21</sup> WHRIN, Exploring the Role of Nollywood in the Muti Murders of Persons with Albinism: A Report to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the 24th Session of the Human Rights Council on the Attacks and Discrimination Against People With Albinism (PWA) (2012) Available at - <http://www.whrin.org/whrin-report-to-un-exploring-the-role-of-nollywood-in-the-muti-murders-of-persons-with-albinism/>



dilemmas facing modern Africans today. Whilst some movies promote the Christian or Islamic faiths, many also focus on more beliefs in the power of witchcraft and juju, and explore the role that such beliefs play in the daily lives of Africans.

A large number of such films were produced in 2016 alone including, amongst others, the following movies: War of the Witches, Kingdom of the Witches - 1, 2 & 3, Sexy Witches, Power of the Witches, Azila, Queen of the Witches, Ritual Money, Magic Money, I Sacrificed my Wife for Money Ritual and I Killed Him for Money Ritual. On a more positive note, WHRIN was encouraged to see the production of a Nollywood film - Save the Albino Child - which highlighted the role that communities can play in preventing persons with albinism from being killed for their body parts to be used for muti, or juju.

However, it is the malevolent impact of Nollywood films in fuelling the epidemic of witchcraft accusations and persecution across Nigeria that is most apparent. Recorded cases highlight the scale and impact of the viewing of Nollywood films across Africa such as a case in Zimbabwe in November 2016, where a mentally ill woman was axed to death by an assailant who suspected her to be a “goblin”. In acquitting the accused, the Judge, Justice Bere, appeared to condone such acts when he ruled that the assailant had “fallen power to the belief in witchcraft that is largely entrenched in society”. Furthermore, Justice Bere stated that “The belief in witchcraft is rampant, especially for those who are accustomed to Nigerian films and, of course, Zimbabwe is no exception to this frightening belief.”<sup>22</sup>

## 6.6 The Challenge of Implementing New Laws and Action Plans

### Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

“Every Akwa Ibom child will be completely protected by this law we are signing today, and this is a commitment we would protect with all the might of the legal instruments at our disposal. We have come to make a law to protect everything we cherish and value....”<sup>23</sup> Those were the words from Akwa Ibom State Governor Godswill Akpabio shortly after signing the Child Rights Bill into Law on December 5, 2008, legislation which also criminalised the act of accusing children of witchcraft. The law was passed rapidly after widespread negative international attention generated by NGOs and the documentary - Saving Africa’s Witch Children.

However, despite the assurances from Government that the enactment of this legislation would put a stop to such practices, and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child highlighting this issue in their 2010 report on Nigeria, reports of horrific cases of child rights abuses in



Child Rights Campaign Poster in Nigeria

<sup>22</sup> Available at - <http://www.chronicle.co.zw/belief-in-witchcraft-sees-man-who-killed-goblin-woman-acquitted/>

<sup>23</sup> Available at - <https://www.nigeriafilms.com/style/125-nfc-crime-watch/20431-akwa-ibom-child-witches-still-endangered>

the state continue to day. One such case went viral across the world in 2016 when a Danish NGO worker rescued an emaciated child who had been accused of witchcraft.<sup>24</sup> To date, as far as WHRIN is aware, there have been no successful prosecutions under the child rights act in the state and parents and pastors are still widely reported to be accusing children of witchcraft. Belief in child witches remains endemic in Akwa Ibom State and it would appear that legislation, and the best efforts of NGOs on the ground, have had a limited impact in terms of challenges such beliefs and practices.

### Various States, India

The country with the largest recorded number of cases of abuses linked to witchcraft accusations and persecution is India. It is also the country with the largest number of states with specific legislation in place to prevent such abuses from taking place. Apart from the provisions under Indian Penal Code different states have come up with different legislation to tackle the problem of witch hunting.

- Bihar 1999, which was named “Prevention of Witch (Dayan) Practices Act.”
- Jharkhand established “Anti Witchcraft Act” in 2001 to protect women from inhuman treatment as well to provide victim legal recourse to abuse.
- Chhattisgarh government passed a bill in 2005 named “Chhattisgarh Tonhi Pratama Bill”, which was established to prevent atrocities on women in name of Tonhi.
- Rajasthan government has also passed a bill “Rajasthan Women (Prevention and Protection from Atrocities)” 2006, which makes it illegal as well punishable for calling any woman as “dayan” or to accuse a woman for practicing witchcraft, which extends to three years of imprisonment and Rs 5000 fine.
- The Rajasthan Prevention Of Witch-Hunting Act, 2015[Act No. 14 of 2015][24th April, 2015]An Act to provide for effective measures to tackle the menace of witchhunting and to prevent the practice of witch craft in the State of Rajasthan and for matters connected therewith and incidental thereto.
- Odisha Prevention of Witch-Hunting Bill, 2013 with provisions of imprisonment up to seven years and penalty for offenders.
- Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Act, 2015 and made any offence under the Act as non-bailable, cognizable and non-compoundable, torturing of women in the name of haunting down ‘witches’.

When this latest bill was enacted, in a 2016 newspaper report, Jadav Chandra Deka, an Assam state legislator said: “It is a good bill, many innocent people are being killed so we want to pass this bill,”. He added that he expects the law to lead to a reduction in crime. However, like WHRIN, many experts, such as Professor Arupjyoti Saikia from the Indian Institute of Technology in Assam’s capital, Guwahati, have their doubts. “The legislative intervention might help in controlling [to some extent] the instances of witch hunting, but how can a deep-rooted social practice be challenged by law?” He said.<sup>25</sup> “I don’t think legislations would bring to an end these age-old practices,” said Shankar Prasad Bhattacharjee, an advocate at the High Court in Guwahati. “They [people who practice witch-hunting] are so illiterate, so blind in thought that until and unless you make some effort to enlighten them about the laws and the consequences of their actions, I don’t think there will be any effect”. “There is no dearth of legislation [in India],” he added.

Little research has been carried out into the impact new legislation has on the prevalence of cases of WAP in India, or any other country. Until more empirical evidence is produced it is hard to contend whether legislation has any discernible impact on such beliefs and practices. What we do know is that cases of witchcraft accusations and persecution against women in all of the states where legislation exists were recorded in 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Available at - <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3519230/I-thinking-son-saw-Hope-Care-worker-rescued-starving-Nigerian-witch-boy-two-bundled-emaciated-body-street-fed-miraculous-recovery-breaks-silence.html><sup>25</sup> Available at - <http://time.com/4000006/assam-witch-hunting-bill-passed-jharkhand-india/>

<sup>25</sup> Available at - <http://time.com/4000006/assam-witch-hunting-bill-passed-jharkhand-india/>



## 6.7 Inactive Action Plans – UK



### May 2016, London, UK

“Witchcraft child abuse cases investigated by Met rise by over 50%”  
- The number of child abuse cases involving witchcraft that were dealt with by the Metropolitan Police has risen by over 50% in three years, the force has revealed. According to their reports, in the previous year Scotland Yard investigated 60 cases where youths had been accused of being possessed by evil spirits. Experts say children are often subjected to "brutal" treatment such as being beaten or having chilli rubbed in their eyes during. Campaigners have called for more help to protect vulnerable children.

In 2012, in response to a number of horrific cases of child abuse, such as those of Victoria Cimbíé, Khyra Ishaq, Boy “Adam” and Kristy Bamu, the UK Government developed the National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief. This plan aims to address certain kinds of child abuse linked to faith or belief.

This includes: belief in concepts of witchcraft and spirit possession, demons or the devil acting through children or leading them astray (traditionally seen in some Christian beliefs), the evil eye or djinns (traditionally known in some Islamic faith contexts) and dakini (in the Hindu context); ritual or muti murders where the killing of children is believed to bring supernatural benefits or the use of their body parts is believed to produce potent magical remedies; and use of belief in magic or witchcraft to create fear in children to make them more compliant when they are being trafficked for domestic slavery or sexual exploitation.

The National Action plan focuses on four key thematic areas:

- Engaging Communities
- Empowering Practitioners
- Supporting Victims and Witnesses
- Communicating Key Messages

However, in 2016, the National Working Group on Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief commissioned a study<sup>26</sup> to assess knowledge of the National Action Plan. Awareness

in this area was very low with only 12% of respondents stating that they were familiar with it. Further, 77% of respondents did not know if their Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB) includes policy and procedure on this form of child abuse.

According to the report: “The results illustrate the desire of frontline professionals and faith communities to engage with the issue of child abuse linked to faith or belief and the necessity to be properly equipped to do this. There is a need for a toolkit to enable the early identification of this form of abuse and promote effective response and intervention.”

Ultimately, one of the key challenges with implementing the National Action Plan on Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief, is that the UK Government has failed to assign any funding to this. Whilst issues such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) have received significant attention, and funding, in recent years, the Government is yet to show any sign of providing such support to implement the National Action Plan.

Set against this backdrop, social workers such as Amma Anane-Agyei, from Tower Hamlet’s African children and families service, complain that the number of cases “are on the increase” in 2016,<sup>27</sup> it would appear that much more work still remains to be done to implement the National Action Plan on Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief.

<sup>26</sup> Oakley, Kinmond, Dioum & Humphreys, Practitioner and communities’ awareness of CALFB: Child abuse linked to faith or belief (2016)

<sup>27</sup> Available at - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-36300200>

## 6.7 Inactive Action Plans - Papua New Guinea

In 2013, widespread publicity given to the deaths of two women accused of witchcraft in Papua New Guinea (PNG) drew international and national attention to the problem of WAP in the country. In the face of mounting pressure to take action, including the national haus kraï protest calling for an end to violence against women, the government responded by repealing the Sorcery Act 1971 and creating a new provision in the Criminal Code Act 1974 (Chapter 262). Section 229A of the Criminal Code Act provides that any person who intentionally kills another person on account of an accusation of sorcery is guilty of wilful murder, for which the penalty is death.



According to Miranda Forsyth, from Australian National University, there is growing recognition, both within the government and the wider community, that these problems cannot be solved solely at a legislative level, and must rather involve a holistic response.<sup>28</sup> This recognition then led to a draft national action plan being developed in to provide a concrete foundation for this holistic response. The drafting of the Sorcery National Action Plan (SNAP) began in June 2014. However, despite the best efforts of Government, Church groups, academics and activists, by November 2016, it was still being finalised and awaiting implementation.

The plan has five core areas: legal and protection, health, advocacy and communication, care and counselling, and research. Each area contains a few key recommendations and sets out concrete activities to be taken in both the short and medium term to implement the recommendations. The action plan also allocates specific responsibilities to particular departments and organisations, establishes time frames, and highlights the resources (human and financial) that are necessary or available to implement them.

The challenges of implementing the SNAP remain significant and are seemingly being hindered by a number of factors. Like many of those working on the front-line of these issues, the prominent Catholic priest - Father Philip Gibbs - who has worked on the issue of sorcery accusation in Papua New Guinea for over 20 years now - claims that the problem is getting worse and spreading to new areas of Papua New Guinea. As with the implementation of the UK action plan, lack of funding is hindering the efforts of NGOs, Faith groups and academics to implement the SNAP. According to Father Gibbs: “there are huge constraints on the government of Papua New Guinea these days and I think we can’t just rely on what they are planning so we are trying to look at other sources of funding. We have to look at all the possibilities that don’t rely necessarily on funding, but to try and find funding from other sources.”<sup>29</sup>

Again, against this backdrop, cases of women being murdered for practicing sorcery were recorded by WHRIN in 2016, for example when four women were tied up naked, beaten, burned and cut with machetes by villagers in the highlands. The women were accused of “invisibly” taking the heart of a local man with sorcery. One woman died and two were exiled when the villagers turned on them. Video of the man talking about his experience went viral on the internet.

Thankfully, more recently, there are some recent signs of hope that things may change in Papua New Guinea and that elements of the SNAP may be implemented. For example, in March 2017, more than 100 men were charged over the killings of seven people who they believed were practising sorcery.<sup>30</sup> The case is related to an incident in 2014 when a large group of men allegedly overran a neighbouring village, searching for people who had

<sup>28</sup> Miranda Forsyth, New Draft National Action Plan to Address Sorcery Accusation-Related Violence in Papua New Guinea. (2014)

<sup>29</sup> Available at - <http://www.radionz.co.nz/international/programmes/datelinepacific/audio/201824119/png-looks-to-implement-sorcery-national-action-plan>

<sup>30</sup> Available at - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/28/mass-sorcery-trial-of-more-than-100-men-begins-in-papua-new-guinea>

committed sorcery, burning down houses and violently killing seven people. Two children, aged three and five, were reportedly taken from their mother's arms and hacked to death.

Clearly the International community has an important role to play in supporting the PNG Government with the implementation of the SNAP and WHRIN hopes that the UN Expert Workshop on Witchcraft and Human Rights will provide a platform for the good work that has been carried out to date and enable the creation of opportunities that will lead to such support being garnered.

## 7. SUCCESSES AND SIGNS OF HOPE

In amongst an analysis of so many, often brutal and horrific, cases of human rights abuse that were recorded during 2016 are some stories that provide hope that good practice can be developed to prevent further human rights abuses taking place. Some examples of this can be found below:

### 7.1 People with Albinism in Malawi and Tanzania

As a result of international and national advocacy on the issue of PWA being killed for their bodies parts in Tanzania, which has been led to great effect by the Canadian NGO - Under the Same Sun - the United Nations Human Rights Council and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights adopted resolutions in 2013 and 2014 calling for the prevention of attacks and discrimination against persons with albinism. On 18 December 2014, the General Assembly adopted resolution 69/170, proclaiming, with effect from 2015, 13 June as International Albinism Awareness Day. Moreover, in response to the call from civil society organizations advocating to consider persons with albinism as a specific group with particular needs that require special attention, on 26 March 2015, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted resolution 28/L.10 creating the mandate of Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights of persons with albinism.

For a small NGO like Under the Same Sun, this in itself was a phenomenal achievement, however, since the appointment of Ikponwosa Ero as the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, further huge positive strides have been taken to both identify and eradicate the practice of killing PWA for their body parts in Tanzania and Malawi.

During Ms Ero's first, high profile, visit to Malawi in April 2016 she raised concerns that PWA fear 'extinction' in Malawi after long string of murders.<sup>31</sup> At least 17 PWA had been murdered for their body parts in the last 2 years. According to her the situation was "an emergency, a crisis disturbing in its proportions" for people with the condition, who face being killed to be used in witchcraft.<sup>32</sup> Amnesty International believes that the actual number of people with albinism killed is likely to be much higher due to the fact that many secretive rituals in rural areas are never reported.



President Mutharika has Taken a Tough Stance on the Muti Murders of PWA for their Body Parts

<sup>30</sup> Available at - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/28/mass-sorcery-trial-of-more-than-100-men-begins-in-papua-new-guinea>

<sup>31</sup> Available at - <http://metro.co.uk/2016/04/30/albino-people-fear-extinction-in-malawi-after-long-string-of-murders-5851422/>

<sup>32</sup> Available at - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-36168742>



To their great credit, the response from the Malawian government to the crisis was swift and in June 2016, the President “declared war against ‘terrorists’ who kill albinos”.<sup>33</sup> During an address on International Albinism Awareness Day, President Mutharika said that perpetrators of crimes against PWA nationals would face the full might of the law. Mutharika has previously expressed concern over the scourge of attacks against PWA in the southern African country, saying he felt “terrible” and “ashamed” at the plight of those living with albinism in the country.

Following on from this, also in June 2016, a Malawian court banned witch doctors from operating in the country. Judge Dingiswayo Madise granted an order stopping “all traditional healers, witch doctors, charm producers, magic users and fortune tellers from operating in the country to eliminate issues of albino attacks and killings.”<sup>34</sup> Whilst it remains to be seen what impact such steps will have on curbing the killings of PWA, WHRIN broadly welcomes such measures and sees them as being potential solutions to complex problems.

Finally, the most positive news on this issue came recently in July 2017, when Ms Ero carried out an 11 day advocacy tour of Tanzania. Her key findings were that “the root causes of the attacks against PWA remain rampant, and the effects of over a decade of violations have taken their toll..... PWA are still living in fear, particularly in rural areas.” Ms Ero, said more work was needed to address witchcraft and educate the public. However, she welcomed a drop in the number of reported attacks and praised the Government for its work to tackle the issue. She stated: “I welcome the measures already taken by the Government and civil society, and the decrease in the number of reported attacks,” she said. “There have been positive measures to address witchcraft practices, including the registration of traditional healers.”<sup>35</sup>

Such significant developments, aside from all the wider work on the issue of albinism carried out by Ms Ero in the last two years since commencing her office,<sup>36</sup> highlight the importance of this UN mandate and it is WHRIN’s sincere hope that this mandate will be renewed for another term so that the good work that has been carried out on these issues can be properly implemented.

## 7.2 A War against witch-doctors in Sierra Leone

According to an Al-Jazeera report in October 2016, the Sierra Leone Government has taken the lead in the fight against muti murders of people for their body parts in the country by pursuing a case against one of the most powerful witch-doctors in the country - Baimba Moi Foray - who was found guilty of killing Sydney Buckle, one of Sierra Leone’s most popular on-air radio personalities. The day after Buckle attended a birthday party at Foray’s house, his body was found in an alley two miles away wrapped in cloth with three toes missing, a punctured eye and a large hole in his neck. The case grabbed national attention.

Foray had been something of a local celebrity as both a socialite and a lavishly paid personal witch doctor to powerful clients. During the trial, Sulaiman Bah, Sierra Leone’s director of public prosecution, suggested that the mutilation of Buckle’s body was synonymous with certain traditional rituals. Foray chose not to testify, but rumours of black magic spread rapidly over social media and talk radio. After a year long trial, Foray and his bodyguard were found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging.<sup>37</sup> Whilst the morals of the death penalty remain open to debate, WHRIN sees the action taken by the Government of Sierra Leone on this case as being of significant importance and highlights the country as one of the leaders in the fight to eradicate such harmful beliefs and practices.

---

<sup>33</sup> Available at - <http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/malawis-mutharika-declares-war-against-terrorists-who-kill-albinos-20160614>

<sup>34</sup> Available at - <https://www.thenational.ae/world/malawi-witchdoctors-banned-in-wake-of-albino-killings-1.202382>

<sup>35</sup> Available at - <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=57271#.Wb77IsgPIU>

<sup>36</sup> See for example - <http://albinism.ohchr.org/>

<sup>37</sup> Available at - <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/10/prepare-gallows-sierra-leone-death-penalty-161025080542700.html>

### 7.3 Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and Other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act.


This act, which was enacted in the Indian state of Maharashtra in 2013, is one of the most comprehensive pieces of legislation looking at the issue of harmful witchcraft beliefs and practices in that it goes much further than just criminalising witchcraft accusations, and covers issues such as human sacrifice, fake healers and advertising ‘miracles’ to make money.

It took the murder of rationalist Narendra Dabholkar for the Act to finally see the light of day in December 2013. Dabholkar had drafted the original bill in 2003 and since then fought relentlessly for its passage in the face of stiff opposition. Three years after Dabholkar’s death, which is still unresolved, it has been claimed that more than 150 cases have been filed till date under the Act<sup>38</sup>, with WHRIN documenting a number of such cases in 2016.<sup>39</sup>


### AIM OF THE LAW

The Maharashtra assembly passed a diluted version of the anti-superstition bill in December 2013. It aims to protect people from harmful superstitions and associated practices such as human sacrifice and black magic. However, religious yatras, festivals and other harmless rituals are allowed.


### THE LAW ADDRESSES ACTS SUCH AS




Beating or sexually abusing a person on the pretext of exorcising ghosts or evil spirits




Displaying/advertising 'miracles' and using them to make money by deceiving, defrauding and terrorising people




Claiming to have to supernatural powers to help people find for precious goods or secret treasures by way of witchcraft



Creating an impression that a person with a mental disorder has supernatural powers and using them to make money




Seeking sexual favours by claiming to be an incarnation of a holy spirit and pretending to have had a relationship with him or her in a past life.



Prohibiting and preventing a person from taking medicines for a dog, snake or scorpion bite and instead treating him or her with mantras

### WHEN AND WHY THE ACT WAS PASSED



The Act was passed after the murder of rationalist Narendra Dabholkar (in pic)

Dabholkar drafted the original bill in 2003, which was criticised. However, his death led to protests across the state, and the bill was finally passed into law in December 2013

### YEAR ON YEAR

In 2014, 13 cases were registered under the Act

In 2015, 11 cases were registered

### CONCLUSION

Having assessed the severity of the harmful beliefs and practices contained within this report, there can be no doubt that they represent some of the most challenging, and horrific, human rights abuses that exist in the world today. When one considers the scale of them, and combines this with the various state, faith, and community actors who are claiming that these abuses are on the increase, across the world, it is reasonable to label them as representing a crisis.

This crisis in human rights has been allowed to unfurl and develop, to a large extent, by the failure of UN bodies, government, academics and faith groups to acknowledge it and work together to address it. It is WHRIN’s sincere hope that this report will enable greater understanding to be developed during the UN Expert Workshop on Witchcraft and Human Rights, and that the workshop will then act as a wakeup call to these bodies, and the wider International community, to enable effective strategies to be developed to prevent the further spread of this “virus”.

That the lives of countless people across the world depend on such collective action being taken can be in no doubt. Without it, the elderly and disabled will continue to be tortured and killed after accusations of witchcraft, PWA, and others, will continue to be hunted and murdered for their body parts to be used in magic and children will continue to be sacrificed in some of the most gruesome circumstances imaginable in the 21st Century.

We must not lose hope though, as enough of it exists to suggest that solutions to these complex issues may be possible. Ten years ago FGM campaigners struggled to get their voices heard at UN and National level. Today, such harmful practices, are widely acknowledged as significant human rights concerns and action has been taken to address them. Identifying solutions to the issues contained within this report will require courage; collaboration of practitioners across different fields; funding and support from the international community and the full backing of UN bodies if any discernible positive difference is to be made. All hands, regardless of differences, must join together in this fight if there is to be any chance of success, and it is hoped that this report will act as a form of encouragement for such urgent action to take place.

<sup>38</sup> Available at - <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/In-18-mths-150-cases-filed-under-anti-superstition-Act-most-victims-women/articleshow/48567491.cms>  
<sup>39</sup> Available at - <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/maha-9-booked-under-anti-superstition-and-black-magic-act/1/561515.html>

25

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To date, the harmful beliefs and practices that this report covers have slipped “under the radar” of the UN and the wider international community. This cannot be allowed to continue. In order to drive the awareness and understanding of these issues forward, WHRIN recommends that the following actions take place:

### UN Special Resolution

The wider WHRIN network needs to develop ways of working together to harness our core advocacy skills and competencies in order to secure a special resolution at the UN Human Rights Council by 2019. Securing such a special resolution may not be an easy task and will require patience, perseverance and support from key stakeholders within the UN and permanent missions to the UN. However, it is perfectly realistic and will help to focus the advocacy activities of the network for the two years ahead. Advocating for such a special resolution, will bring the network together and allow for more comprehensive strategies to be developed in order to share learning and identify solutions. Once the special resolution is passed, it is anticipated that this will lead to these issues being mainstreamed into the wider UN human rights monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

### Harmful Beliefs and Practices

WAP, muti murders and human sacrifice, together with other malevolent spiritual beliefs, should be considered as harmful beliefs and practices, and mainstreamed into different UN and national programs side-by-side with issues such as FGM and forced marriage. Considerable expertise has been developed in this field over recent years, and this provides an opportunity for such issues to be incorporated into this important field of work, so that greater awareness and understanding can be developed.

### More Research

There is a pressing need for more research to be carried out into the links between public health, increased legislation, Nollywood, faith leaders, witchdoctors and the prevalence of these human rights abuses. Academics need to broaden the scope of their partnerships and look to engage more effectively with community organisations, healthcare practitioners and social workers if more meaningful research is to be carried out

### Faith Leaders

Voices of prominent faith leaders have been relatively quiet on the issues contained within this report to date. Whilst there are some promising signs of action being taken, large-scale, multi-faith, engagement on these issues has still not been delivered. Platforms where faith leaders can come together to share their experiences, theological understandings and plans for action should be encouraged wherever possible. With time, this may hopefully lead to stronger leadership being displayed by a wider network of faith leaders on these issues.

### Training

Practitioners, particularly police, judges, social workers, refugee workers, lawyers and teachers, should be able provided with access to training on these issues in order to enable them to identify cases of abuse and provide the support needed by victims. WHRIN’s current training course on these issues may be adapted here to suit different contexts and empower such practitioners with the skills and the confidence that they need to work on these complex issues.









**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.

If you think that this report and WHRIN's wider work is important then please consider donating to WHRIN today so that we can help further raise awareness of the issues you have just read about. [www.whrin.org/donate](http://www.whrin.org/donate)

#### Contact Us:

Witchcraft and Human Rights  
Information Network (WHRIN)  
483 Green Lanes,  
London, N13 4BS, United Kingdom

Email: [info@whrin.org](mailto:info@whrin.org)

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

  WHRIN

