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**New Hope for Survivors as they Celebrate Historic UN Resolution Condemning Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks**

Following 6 years of intensive advocacy by a coalition[[1]](#footnote-1) of survivors, NGOs, academics and lawyers, the UN Human Rights Council has passed a ground-breaking resolution, which “emphatically condemns harmful practices related to accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks that result in human rights violations” said Ms. Ikponwosa Ero, UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism.

Survivors of these harmful practices have expressed their great happiness at this news and optimism that it may be the start of the end of some of the most horrific human rights abuses imaginable. One of them is Mardoche Yembi, who was 8 when accused by a pastor of being a witch in London. He said: “When I heard the news about the resolution I felt fantastic. I can see that there is now hope for the future, especially for those who are going through what I suffered. Importantly, I also see real progress as 10 years ago it wasn’t like this. Thanks to all of the people who have helped make this happen there is now light at the end of the tunnel that these terrible practices may one day be eradicated”.

Across the world, women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, particularly persons with albinism, and other conditions such as epilepsy, autism and dementia suffer wide-ranging human rights abuses due to Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks (HPAWR). These include, but are not limited to, killings, mutilation, exploitation and sale of persons, organs and body parts, burnings, grave robberies, torture and significant stigmatization of victims and their family members.

Both issues also strongly share several root causes including entrenched ignorance about causes of sickness and death, religious profiteering, as well as lack of access to adequate health care and information, poverty, and weak systems of justice and security.

Lancaster University’s Dr Charlotte Baker and Gary Foxcroft, Director of the Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN) said: “Reported data[[2]](#footnote-2) shows that in the last decade that there have been at least 20,000 victims of these harmful practices across 50 countries and 6 Continents who have faced extreme human rights violations including loss of life, limbs and property due to harmful practices. Today marks an important step towards delivering justice for them and preventing more abuses”.

One such person is Mariamu Staford who has albinism and hails from a small village in the Lake District in Tanzania. In 2008, while sleeping with her 2-year-old son, Mariamu was attacked by two men who cut off her arms, hoping to profit from the gruesome trade in body parts of people with albinism. Her son was unhurt, and she survived the loss of her arms after spending weeks in a hospital. Mariamu bravely identified her attackers, who were arrested but never convicted of the crimes they committed. In a bitter twist, her village turned against her for “bringing shame to them” by seeking justice. She said: “The UN resolution gives me personal hope, as a victim of these harmful practices, that one day justice will be served and they will end. Even better, the resolution ensures that people with albinism, who haven’t been victims are protected from such harmful practices. I pass my sincere gratitude to the UN for this landmark resolution that will ensure equity, equality and dignity for all people with albinism.”

Whilst UN resolutions are certainly not the only remedy to prevent such deeply engrained and complex harmful practices, this important step by the UN Human Rights Council could be a key turning point to prevent the horrendous violence which characterizes these types of harmful practices and which, for too long, have destroyed and taken too many lives.

1. Coalition made up of the United Nations Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, the Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network & its member-organizations, Lancaster University,

Under the Same Sun, The National FGM Centre, UK, Doughty Street Chambers, UK, Australian National University, Divine Word University, Papua New Guinea, the Centre for Human Rights of the University of Pretoria, the International Human Rights Program of the University of Toronto and Staffordshire University, UK. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Concept Note on the Elimination of Harmful Practices related to Witchcraft Accusations and Ritual Killings available on this page - https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/albinism/pages/iealbinism.aspx [↑](#footnote-ref-2)