



NGO Written Statement submitted to the 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Council  
Item 3: Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on Violence  
against Children

## **The Enduring Violence against the Albino Children in the United Republic of Tanzania**

### **I. Introduction**

Franciscans International, Edmund Rice International, and Marist International Solidarity Foundation – ONLUS would like to draw the attention of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on Violence against Children and the Human Rights Council (HRC) to the plight of albino children in the United Republic of Tanzania.

In recent years, people with albinism have been subjected to atrocious levels of violence and killed due to a witchcraft belief that their body parts bring wealth and success to those who consume them. While it is difficult to estimate the magnitude of this phenomenon, it is clear that children are increasingly becoming targets of such violent acts. Children with albinism are continuously suffering from abuse and exploitation and most cases end in fatality. They are often rejected by their families and communities who consider them as “curse”, and are subjected to extreme discrimination and stigmatization.

Undoubtedly, the murder and mutilation of albino children constitutes a prominent violation of fundamental human rights. While the Government of Tanzania has highlighted its progress and commitment<sup>1</sup> to addressing the situation of albino people in terms of prosecution and prevention, our organizations remain deeply concerned about the protection of innocent victims. Therefore, we believe that there is an urgent need to take immediate action at international, regional, and national levels towards the protection of this vulnerable group of children and the eradication of the practice.

### **II. The Current Situation**

Since 2007, violence against albino people in the United Republic of Tanzania has reached alarming levels. Barbaric murders of albinos are most frequent in the Lake Victoria region of Mwanza, Mara, Kagera, Rukwa, Kigoma and Shinyanga. Other areas where such murders have occurred include Mbeya in southern Tanzania and Morogoro and Singida in the central parts of the country. Moreover, the wave of albino killings seems to have rapidly crossed national borders and acquired a regional dimension, affecting neighboring countries such as Burundi, Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Senegal and Zimbabwe<sup>2</sup>. Statistics on albino killings in Tanzania are sorely lacking, and figures tend to vary widely. According to the Tanzanian Government, fifty-four incidents of albino killings have been reported in the country

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<sup>1</sup>Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, *National report of the United Republic of Tanzania*, A/HRC/WG.6/12/TZA/1, 19 July 2011, § 64; Human Rights Committee, *Replies to the List of Issues*, CCPR/C/TZA/Q/4/Add.1, 24 June 2009, § 39.

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF WACARO, CIMPRIC, Aleksandra, *Children accused of Witchcraft, An Anthropological Study on Contemporary Practices in Africa*, April 2010, p. 28, available at [http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/wcaro\\_children-accused-of-witchcraft-in-Africa.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/wcaro_children-accused-of-witchcraft-in-Africa.pdf).

between 2007 and January 2011<sup>3</sup>. Civil society actors, however, maintain that “*there are hundreds and hundreds of killings in Tanzania, but only a small number are being reported to the police.*”<sup>4</sup> Although violence against albinos in neighboring countries hasn’t reached the same levels as in Tanzania, the situation requires attention<sup>5</sup>.

The killing and mutilation of albinos is associated with the belief that certain of their body parts have supernatural powers and can make a person rich or successful. Thus, the demand for albino body parts is fuelled by the lucrative trade linked to the practice of witchcraft in a country facing poverty and social challenges. Traditional witch doctors, who hire middlemen to commit these acts of murder, are primarily responsible for albino killings. Despite the difficulties in identifying the middlemen because of the underground nature of the crime, it is believed that community leaders, family members and neighbors have been acting as middlemen in the albino black market<sup>6</sup>. The market for albino people is concentrated in the hands of a particular group of people: fishermen in the Lake Victoria region of Tanzania<sup>7</sup> and the gold and diamond miners situated mainly in Sukumaland, the centre of Tanzanian mining industry<sup>8</sup>.

### III. Consequences of Traditional Beliefs against Albino Children in Tanzania

The plight of albino people is a worrying phenomenon in the United Republic of Tanzania and a flagrant violation of the human rights of this vulnerable group of society. Our organizations are particularly concerned that albino children are subjected to physical and sexual violence, stigmatized, discriminated against and cruelly killed; as such they are denied their fundamental rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

#### Physical and Sexual Violence

One of the most common consequences of these witchcraft beliefs for children with albinism is physical and sexual violence. They are subjected to physical and psychological violence by witch doctors and middlemen, as well as by members of their family and community trying to make an easy profit. Victims are caught, barbarically mutilated and their body parts are sold to witch doctors. The violence can have extreme consequences leading in most cases to the death of the children and this causes many children to live in fear of being killed. Most often they are abandoned by their family or obliged to run away because of violence and abuse at home and, as a result, find themselves in a street situation. Once in the street they continue to be subjected to violence and abuse, including by law enforcement authorities who are supposed to protect them<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, girls with albinism are often victims of sexual abuse. There is a strong belief that having sexual intercourse with an albino girl will heal AIDS. This has led to a

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<sup>3</sup> Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, (ibid), § 64.

<sup>4</sup> Reuters Africa, *Albinos in Tanzania murdered or raped as AIDS "cure"*, 5 May 2011, available at <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJ0E74408020110505?sp=true>.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF WACARO, (ibid), p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> SCHNOEBELEN, Jill, UNHCR, *Witchcraft Allegations, Refugee Protection and Human Rights: A Review of the Evidence*, 2009, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=4981ca712&query=witch>, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> BRYCESON, Deborah, *Miners' Magic: Artisanal Mining, the Albino Fetish and Murder in Tanzania*, 2010, p. 355.

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF WACARO, (ibid), p. 40.

significant number of cases of albino girls being raped, even though most of these cases go unreported due to the social stigma the girls would face if they made their abuse known<sup>10</sup>.

#### Stigmatization and Discrimination

Children with albinism are subjected to social stigmatization and discrimination for life. They often experience this in the family environment as they are perceived to bring bad luck, but also in their community, neighborhood and schools where they struggle to be accepted by their peers. Apart from stigmatization, they also face discrimination and are often excluded from family and social life. It has been reported that in some cases, families are responsible for the killing of their own albino children in order to avoid future stigma.<sup>11</sup>

#### IV. Gaps in Government's Response to protect Children with Albinism

The issue of massacres against albino people, especially children, has been brought to the attention of the international community and addressed by various UN human rights mechanisms<sup>12</sup> calling upon the Government to comply with its international human rights obligations and commitments. Despite some positive steps being taken by the Government, no substantial change has been noted. Therefore, we are concerned about the urgent need to take appropriate action to effectively address the situation of albino people by preventing further violence, prosecuting those responsible, and ensuring full redress to victims and their families.

##### Prosecution

The Tanzanian Government has taken several criminal measures to put an end to the heinous killings of albinos and bring the perpetrators to justice. In 2009, Tanzania banned witchcraft and temporarily withdrew the licenses of traditional witch doctors through amendments to the Tanzanian Witchcraft Act<sup>13</sup>. Subsequently, the government made the killing of an albino a capital crime claiming that *"the sentence has remained an important tool for protection of innocent victims of vicious killings of, for example, (...) albinos for their parts and limbs (...)"*<sup>14</sup>. In reality, these measures didn't remedy the situation; on the contrary, they have caused an exodus of witch doctors to neighboring countries, such as Burundi and Uganda, with a view to continuing their practice. Moreover, it caused disagreement among civil society actors with regard to the appropriateness of the death penalty to punish such acts<sup>15</sup>.

Furthermore, measures have been taken to fast-track investigation and prosecution of criminal cases on albino killings. In this respect, the Government launched a country-wide campaign with the purpose of identifying the suspected perpetrators and helping the police in initiating criminal investigations. It also conducted a national census to ascertain the number of people affected by albinism.<sup>16</sup> However, the Government doesn't have an exact number of

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<sup>10</sup> Reuters Africa, *Albinos in Tanzania murdered or raped as AIDS "cure"*, (ibid).

<sup>11</sup> WHITTAKER, Nicola, *Under threat: Albinos in Tanzania*, 2 March 2011, available at: [http://www.consultancyafrica.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=705:under-threat-albinos-in-tanzania-&catid=91:rights-in-focus&Itemid=296](http://www.consultancyafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=705:under-threat-albinos-in-tanzania-&catid=91:rights-in-focus&Itemid=296)

<sup>12</sup> A/HRC/WG.6/12/TZA/1, § 64; CCPR/C/TZA/Q/4/Add.1, § 39; CRC/C/OPSC/TZA/CO/1, § 20; CEDAW/C/TZA/CO/6, § 142-143.

<sup>13</sup> MOE, Caitlin, *Persecution of Albinism in Tanzania*, October 2011, available at: <http://prospectjournal.ucsd.edu/index.php/2011/10/persecution-of-albinism-in-tanzania/>.

<sup>14</sup> Human Rights Committee, (ibid), § 12.

<sup>15</sup> MOE, Caitlin, (ibid).

<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Committee, (ibid), § 39.

people with albinism as many families do not register their children affected by albinism<sup>17</sup>. The collection of information through a secret ballot in which people could accuse members of their community of albino killings put into question the credibility of data provided to the police<sup>18</sup>. Additionally, it is reported that due to a high level of corruption police forces are implicated in the trade of albinos<sup>19</sup>. The legal proceedings have been slow resulting in an insignificant number of perpetrators brought to justice<sup>20</sup>.

### Prevention

Our organizations note some positive steps with regard to prevention of further violence, such as the creation of a multi-disciplinary Albino Task Force charged with conducting research on the ways to tackle the problem. In this respect, together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), it has undertaken a nationwide study to evaluate the magnitude of violence against disadvantaged groups of society, including people with albinism. Public awareness campaigns have also been launched in partnership with religious institutions and schools to address the ignorance at the root of the problem<sup>21</sup>.

### Protection

The Tanzanian Government hasn't done much in terms of protection of people with albinism, leaving this responsibility to international organizations. Protection is offered to those albinos who survive to adolescence through the provision of the disability status because of their risk of skin cancer and problems with their vision. This status merely provides them access to health care services and education institutions generally funded by international organizations. However, it doesn't necessarily guarantee them a safe environment or protect them from stigma and discrimination<sup>22</sup>.

## V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Given the complexity of the albino issue, we believe that a fully integrated response is needed at international, regional and national levels based on three axes: prosecution, prevention, and protection. This should involve coordination amongst different actors, including the Government, civil society, communities, families, schools and children, along with the assistance of the international community.

In this regard, we suggest the following recommendations:

To the international community:

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<sup>17</sup> ACKLEY, Caroline, *The Fetishization of Albinos in Tanzania*, December 2010, available at: <http://www.underthesamesun.com/sites/default/files/The%20Fetishization%20of%20Albinos%20in%20Tanzania.pdf>, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> CHINENYE, Dave-Odigie, *Albino Killings in Tanzania: Implications for Security*, April 2010, available at: <http://peaceconsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Chinenye-P.-Dave-Odigie-Pg-68-75.pdf>, p. 72.

<sup>19</sup> SCHNOEBELEN, Jill, (ibid), p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> BRYCESON, Deborah, (ibid), p. 355.

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Committee, (ibid), § 39.

<sup>22</sup> SCHNOEBELEN, Jill, (ibid), p. 29.

- Strengthen international cooperation and mutual assistance to address the situation of people with albinism in Tanzania and in neighboring countries;
- Raise awareness on the matter and ensure that international protection is provided to the victims of such practices, including the granting of refugee status.

To the Government of Tanzania:

#### Prosecution

- Strengthen the capacity of the law enforcement agencies to conduct effective investigations into the allegations of albino killings and ensure that all perpetrators are brought to justice;
- Amend the existing legislation and ensure that fair penalties - which should not include the death penalty in any instance - are put in place so as to guarantee that those responsible for albino killings are punished and the rule of law is respected;
- Provide for an efficient system to collect reliable and up to date data in order to elaborate statistics on the number of cases involving albinos which have been investigated, prosecuted, and sentenced;
- Strictly regulate the activities of traditional witch doctors and monitor the issuing of their licenses.

#### Prevention

- Strengthen and intensify education and awareness raising campaigns amongst families and community leaders, local authorities, witch doctors, and the population at large to prevent future stigmatization and discrimination of people with albinism and ensure their safety;
- Raise awareness at school and education centres on the causes and characteristics of albinism in order to ensure the equal access to education of albino children;
- Disseminate the results of the nationwide study on violence against disadvantaged groups of society, including people with albinism, and make them known to the public at large;
- Provide trainings to law enforcement authorities in order to raise awareness and educate public officials on child protection, especially on children with albinism;
- Enhance cooperation with other East African countries and make efforts to further engage them in the eradication of the brutal killings of people with albinism.

#### Protection

- Ensure that albinos have equal access to quality education and health care, within the framework of inclusion policies, and guarantee that they receive adequate social and legal protection, as highlighted by the European Parliament's Resolution on the Killing of Albinos in Tanzania;<sup>23</sup>
- Enhance the security of children with albinism through the adoption and the implementation of safety measures in all schools;

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<sup>23</sup> European Parliament, Resolution *on the Killing of Albinos in Tanzania*, 4 September 2008, available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2008-0413+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>, § 10.

- Develop reintegration strategies that include an anti-stigma component to avoid stigmatization of children returning to their families and community.