



Persons with albinism:

Killed for “Muti”

What is “Muti?”

Muti (pronounced mu:ti) is a zulu word that means traditional African medicine or magical charms.¹ It is a word most commonly used in southern Africa to represent African medicine. It specifically means African medicine involving the use of human body parts.² In western Africa, “juju” could be described as the equivalent of muti.³

Muti and the use of human body parts

Human body parts are used in muti to support the belief that regular muti medicine will be more effective if human body parts are involved. The body parts are often taken from live victims because of the belief that the intensity of their screams, while being chopped, enhances the potency of the medicine.⁴ Muti victims are mostly children and most recently in East Africa, children with albinism.⁵ Body parts of muti victims are not only traded locally, but are also often transported across borders of various countries where there is demand.

Why?

Simon Fellows, author of a 2008 report titled *Trafficking Body Parts in Mozambique and South Africa* explains that where human-organ-muti is found, there is often the belief that such muti is a source of wealth and business prosperity.⁶ 70% of people surveyed by Fellows in Mozambique and South Africa for example, believe “that body parts

make muti medicine more effective and that such medicine can solve any problem, from poverty to a variety of illness."⁷

Albino Killings are Muti Killings

The use of the body parts of persons with albinism (PWA) for muti is part of a larger practice in the use of human body parts for muti.⁸ Conservative estimates in the past decade show general muti-related killings of 30 persons per year in southern Africa.⁹ Given the extra muti-mysticism often attached to the potency of the organs of PWA, muti killings specific to PWA is likely higher in Africa as a whole. To date, in the region of sub Saharan Africa, between 2007 and 2013 (the period in which better records have been gathered), about 207 PWA have been killed. A more accurate estimate of muti murders relating to albinism would be considerably higher given that many cases are not reported. Also when one takes into account the link of muti to poverty and the significant rate of poverty on the sub continent, a higher number of victims of muti is likely more accurate.¹⁰

Why Now?

Muti killings have been going on for decades and in some cases, for centuries on various parts of the African sub-continent. The degree and extent and whether these killings have intensified or abated are questions that are not easily answered. This is because muti activities are often shrouded by a “code of silence” which makes reporting, and the necessary prosecution and investigation all the more difficult.¹¹ The silence in muti-use and trading is made worse by the fact that the consumers of muti medicine often remain a mystery.

International Response

On June 13, 2013, the UN Human Rights Council passed a historic resolution addressing discrimination based attacks against PWA.¹² This resolution was the first of its kind dealing with the issue of albinism. It is a notable positive step which is likely to keep the issue of albinism active on the international stage.

National Response

Here are some national judicial responses to muti killings of PWA.

Tanzania

As of June 2013, 11 people have been convicted and sentenced to death so far for butchering and abduction of 5 PWA and 1 PWA respectively. Also, 1 man, a Kenyan national, was jailed for 17 years by a court in Tanzania for the abduction and attempted sale of a Kenyan PWA in Tanzania. He is currently serving his sentence in Kenya.

Currently, there are 2 murder cases that have been mentioned in court and suspects in these cases are currently in remand prison.

Burundi

5 men accused of murdering and selling body parts of persons with albinism were jailed in Burundi. Of the 5, 1 was found guilty of "planning and carrying out the killings" and sentenced to life in jail. The other 4 were found guilty of attempted murder and kidnapping. Their jail terms ranged from 7 to 15 years.¹³

It also appears that some level of investigation and prosecution occurred in other countries with recorded attacks such as South Africa and Nigeria. However, it is extremely difficult to follow-up on these as they tend not to be reported.

Overall, these judicial responses to PWA killings are laudable. However, more needs to be done: more cases need to be tried and the verdicts reported widely as a means of deterrence.

UTSS' Stance on Muti

Under The Same Sun condemns use of the human body for muti purposes. Particularly, UTSS condemns the targeting and killing of any human being, including PWA.

At UTSS, our members of staff on the ground in East Africa and North America are working hard to ensure the health, safety and well-being of PWA in sub Saharan Africa. We are doing this through several programs in education, health and public awareness. We are also inviting governments to condemn muti killings while asking national governments in East Africa to fully investigate, bring to trial and penalize to the full extent of the law, those behind this gruesome trade.

¹ "Muti," Oxford Dictionary(online), accessed August 3, 2010, http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0544420#m_en_gb0544420.

² BBC News, "I was forced to kill my baby," 2002, April 2, accessed August 3, 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/1899609.stm.

³ Juju best describes muti as it is practiced in West Africa. See “The History of African Juju,” accessed June 18, 2013, <http://www.planetvoodoo.com/history-of-ju-ju.htm>.

⁴ See note 2.

⁵ See Chris Rogers, “Africa Children Trafficked to UK for Blood Rituals,” BBC, October 12, 2011, accessed June 17, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15280776>. Also see UTSS’ Report to Mme. Santos Pais, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, “Children with Albinism in Africa: Murder Mutilation and Violence: A Report on Tanzania with Parallel References to other Parts of Africa,” June 19, 2012, accessed June 18, 2013, <http://www.underthesamesun.com/resources>; and Pius Kamau, “Three-year old albino – Victim of Witchcraft Sacrifice,” *The Huffington Post*, May 1, 2012, accessed June 18, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pius-kamau/three-year-old-albino-vic_b_1462991.html.

⁶ Mogakane, Tshwarelo. “Muti Killings Up Ahead of 2010?” *News24*(South Africa), March 6, 2009, accessed August 3, 2010, <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Muti-killings-up-ahead-of-2010-20090305#>.

⁷ See note 6.

⁸ Oloya, Opiyo, “Ritual Killing Cannot Make Anyone Richer.” op ed., *The New Vision*, February 17, 2009, accessed August 3, 2010, <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/20/671762..>

⁹ See note 2.

¹⁰ See note 2 and note 8.

¹¹ See note 6. Also see Simon Fellows, “Trafficking Body Parts in Mozambique and South Africa (2008).” Human Rights League, Mozambique, Accessed August 3, 2010, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/23729111/Trafficking-Body-Parts-in-Mozambique-and-South-Africa-Mozambique-Human-Rights-League>.

¹² United Nations, Human Rights Council, 23rd Regular Session, Resolution A/HRC/23/L.25 Vote Item:3 - 38th Meeting, UN Web TV, accessed June 18, 2013, <http://webtv.un.org/watch/ahrc23l.25-vote-item3-38th-meeting-23rd-regular-session-human-rights-council/2475447878001>.

¹³ Aljazeera, “Killers of Burundi Albinos Jailed,” July 23, 2009, accessed August 3, 2010 <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2009/07/20097231380929658.html>.

Other Resources

AllAfrica.Com, “Probe Reveals Price of Body Parts for Muti,” *Cape Argus*, April 3, 2010, accessed August 3, 2010, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201004030005.html>.

