

Albino Killings Cause Fear and Anxiety



by [MUGISHO N.THEOPHILE](#) (writer), June 23, 2010

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Albinos are in danger as they are being hunted for some parts of their body to be used in witchcraft.

Albinism is also called achromia, achromasia or achromatosis. This is a congenital disorder characterized by the complete or partial absence of pigment in the skin, hair and eyes due to deficiency of an enzyme involved in the production of melanin. Indeed, albinism results from inheritance of recessive gene alleles.

Here in Africa, and particularly in Tanzania and in Burundi, this defect is often associated with bad luck and the latter has connotations with malediction or witchcraft. However, some Africans believe that the body of albinos contains some mysteries. For this reason, African witchdoctors use and sell some hair, nails to fight djinns, a kind of devils or demons who are very popular in this side of Africa. The witch doctors consider parts of albino body as useful to obtain money from business people, to be lucky or to better improve their daily businesses. Such beliefs endangers the lives of these unfortunate people.

Nowadays, albino children are seeking hideouts as albino killings are causing fear and anxiety among them. It is abominable that many children, and even grown up albinos, are living in fear and insecurity of being hunted down by body part harvesters. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies revealed that the killings of albinos in Tanzania and Burundi have evoked deep fear and alarm in the two countries. It is believed that nearly 300 children and teenagers have sought hiding in schools for the disabled and in shelters established by the police in Burundi, where they live under deplorable conditions. Parents who are forced to take care of them have been rendered jobless. Thousands more in the countryside cannot trade, study or farm freely for fear of being hunted down by killers who harvest their blood and some parts of their body such as hair, genitals and limbs for magic.

The official toll is 44 in Tanzania, mainly in the highly superstitious northwest region near Lake Victoria and 12 in the eastern Burundi close to Tanzania. Due to the increasing killings, albinism must be considered as one of the most urgently needs to be addressed at the international level. In some limited respects, local society has responded well and continue to assist in areas they can really add value like public health education and raising the awareness of discrimination.

Salif Keita, a Malian albino singer and human rights activist said that even before the killings began two years ago, the albino community in Tropical Africa suffered an array of afflictions that made physical survival a desperate struggle. He singled out the high incidence of fatal skin cancer due to acute sensitivity of albinos to sunlight. The Tanzania Red Cross Society is planning health education and vocational teaching to improve albinos' chances of finding indoor employment.

For the albino population, this is a fourfold crisis; ill health, stigma, insecurity and delays in legal redress. Having a look at numbers, there are almost 7,000 albinos in Tanzania, 1,000 estimated albino population in Burundi; 300 albino children and teenagers in the hideouts in both countries; 44 official albino death toll in Tanzania and 12 in Burundi and 3 years since albino killings started in Tanzania.

The killing and discrimination against albinos is a serious problem. The solution will come when there are stiff consequences against those that harm them.



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