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HUMAN RIGHTS

Tanzania's first elected albino lawmaker: 'We deserve rights'

November 10, 2010 | From Mwondoshah Mfanga, for CNN

Tanzania's first elected albino lawmaker says his win is a major victory for the embattled minorities who are targeted for body parts believed to have special powers.

Salum Khalfani Bar'wani won a seat in the southern part of the country last week.

The lawmaker said he plans to pressure the government to enact laws to protect albinos and other minorities.

"I am going to fight for their [albino] rights first and foremost," Bar'wani said. "But besides that, I shall also fight for the rights of other people with disabilities -- like those with impaired vision and hearing."

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Tanzania's first elected albino lawmaker Salum Khalfani Bar'wani greets supporters in the southeastern Tanzanian town of Lindi on November 4.



Albinism is a genetic condition that leads to little or no pigment in the eyes, skin and hair.

Body parts of albinos are sought in some regions of Africa, where some believe they bring wealth and good luck.

Attackers chop off their limbs and pluck out their organs, which are sold to witch doctors.

"It is a thriving business ... witchdoctors are asking business people to bring the body parts of albinos, who are not considered human beings," said Franck Alphonse, director of the Tanzania Albino Center.

Bar'wani said he will work to abolish the stereotypes associated with the condition. He hopes human rights activists, religious leaders and lawmakers will team up to help shift attitudes toward albinos.

"My agenda shall be to ask the government to educate the society on the misconceptions that one could get rich quickly merely by possessing albino parts," he said. "We deserve the rights we are fighting for we need to be recognized as part of this society and live like other human beings."

Tanzania has seen a rise in the killings of Albinos, forcing some with the condition to flee to neighboring countries. Dozens of albinos, including children, have been killed in the east African nation in the past two years.

Government officials have said they are educating police officers to help address albino killings, but admit it is hard to quell the attacks.

Most happen in rural areas, where there is limited police presence, said Lucca Haule, a police official in the northern part of the country, where albinos are also targeted.

"We don't have the resources in those places ... it is not easy, but we are trying to map out locations



where albinos live so that we can better protect them," he said.

Critics have said authorities should go after albino killers more aggressively.

Bar'wani won the Lindi Town constituency seat as a candidate for the opposition Civic United Front.

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