Albinos In Uganda Unite to Fight Witchcraft, Discrimination; Aim for Political Power

Albino people throughout Africa are targeted by witchdoctors who use their body parts to make lucrative potions. One organization in Uganda says they are tired of the threats, the fear and the killing. They are organizing everything from family counseling projects to microfinance opportunities for albinos. They are even pushing for an albino representative in Parliament.

by Jackee Batanda, Tuesday - November 16, 2010

KAMPALA, UGANDA – In 2007, the number of albino children being kidnapped, killed and dismembered in Uganda began to rise.

In many countries throughout Africa, including Uganda, the legs, hands, arms and hair of albino children are used by witch doctors to make high-priced potions said to increase wealth and prosperity. Violence and discrimination among albino people in eastern Africa is endless: It is widely believed that sex with an albino will cure HIV – resulting in a high rate of rape among albino women here. Parents who give birth to albino babies frequently abandon them. And albino adults suffer from continuous threats, and social and employment discrimination.

As more and more albinos suffered at the hands of local witch doctors and kidnappers, three albino students at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda’s capital city, formed the Uganda Albino Association, UAA, in 2007, in hopes of raising awareness of the human rights atrocities faced by local albinos. Today, the group has more than 400 members and is recognized nationwide as one of the premier organizations fighting for the rights of albino people. “We mainly face intimidation from sorcerers,” says Judah Ssebyanzi. He says the threats are so severe that, “We do not follow up on cases of missing persons for our own security,” says Ssebyanzi, one of the founders of the UAA.

Worldwide, the chance of being born albino – a condition defined by the complete absence of pigment in the skin, hair and eyes – is 1 in 20,000. In Africa, albinism is much more common as 1 in 4,000 people here are born with the pigment disorder. Albino people typically suffer from vision problems and the rate of skin cancer among albinos is high. But in Africa, the greatest danger is kidnapping and death by dismemberment so their parts can be used by local witch doctors.

The Uganda Albino Association, UAA, has grown in power and prominence over the last three years and is now well-funded and creating programs to help disseminate public information about albinism, council parents of albino infants, increase job placement and even help get albinos elected to parliament.

Fighting Stigma, Increasing Sensitization

For years, albinos in Uganda and east Africa have been silent and endured the stigma surrounding their unique appearance. Media reports in 2008 and 2009 were awash with reports of mass killings of albinos for their body parts. East Africa, like many parts of Africa, is rife with superstitious beliefs. Witchdoctors build on this superstition for selfish gains. It is believed that the use of albino body parts in potions brings great wealth. Albino body parts fetch a high price on the black market. While Uganda does not have the highest rate of albino murders, neighboring Tanzania has the...
world’s highest albino murder rate. Ssebyanzi says the dealers have spread “their net” into Uganda, leaving the UAA with plenty to worry about.
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