

# UN EXPERTS WORKSHOP

## WITCHCRAFT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

21st & 22nd September 2017

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Headquarters  
Palais Wilson, Geneva (Rue des Pâquis, 52)  
Conference Room 1 (1st Floor)

# PROGRAMME



UNITED NATIONS  
INDEPENDENT EXPERT  
PERSONS WITH ALBINISM



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## **Organizers and Sponsors**

### **Organizers:**

This event is organized by the following: Ms. Ikponwosa Ero, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, Gary Foxcroft, Director of the Witchcraft and Human Rights Network (WHRIN); Dr Charlotte Baker, Lancaster University.

### **Co-organizers & Experts:**

Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children, and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities

### **Sponsors:**

- Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the UN in Geneva
- Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN and other international organizations in Geneva
- Permanent Mission of Israel to the UN in Geneva
- Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the UN in Geneva
- Permanent Mission of Portugal to the UN and other international organizations in Geneva
- The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Lancaster University
- Under the Same Sun
- Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network

# Agenda and Speakers

Overall Moderator: Kirsty Brimelow, QC, Chair of Bar Human Rights, UK

## Day One

9.30-10.30 **Opening Remarks by Kate Gilmore, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights and Remarks from Sponsors**

### **PART 1 – Conceptualization of witchcraft**

10.30-11.30 **Panel 1: Manifestations of Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices**

Dr. Birubala Rabha, Human Rights defender, Assam State, India

Mardouche Yembi, Survivor of witchcraft accusation, DRC/UK

Mariam Staford, person with albinism, Survivor of attack, Tanzania

Allan Sembatya, Survivor of attack, Uganda

#### **Question(s):**

How have witchcraft beliefs and practice impacted you/groups you represent?

**Moderator:** Myriam Dessables, Chief of Communications, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

11.30-13.00 **Panel 2: What is ``witchcraft``?**

Prof. Jean La Fontaine, London School of Economics, UK

Rev. Prof. Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, General Secretary of Evangelical Churches Winning All (ECWA), Nigeria

Dr. Simeon Mesaki, specialist in witchcraft studies, Tanzania

Rev. Abel Ngolo, Secrétaire-General-Représentant Légal,  
Equipe Pastorale auprès des Enfants en Détresse, RDC  
Dr. Robert Priest, Taylor University

**Question(s):**

What does “witchcraft” include or encompass?

Note: The purpose of this session is not to have a closed list of elements describing witchcraft but to identify what it includes and how these may be recognized.

**Moderator:** Kirsty Brimelow

13:00-14.15

**Lunch break**

**PART 2 – Harmful Practices**

14.30-16.00

**Panel 3: Witchcraft Accusations**

Dr. Agnes Callamard, Special Rapporteur on  
extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

Dr. Dubravka Simonovic, Special Rapporteur on violence  
against women, its causes and consequences

Commissioner Reine Alpini-Gansou, African Commission  
on Human and Peoples’ Rights

Victoria Lee, Human Rights and Economic and Social  
Issues Section, OHCHR

Kathryn Leslie, Office of the Special Representative of the  
Secretary General on violence against children

Note: Catalina Devandas Aguilar, Special Rapporteur on  
the rights of persons with disabilities will also attend but  
speak from the floor (not on panel)

**Question(s):**

1. How have witchcraft beliefs and practice impacted the human rights of the group you advocate for?
2. Lay out government's human rights obligations in relation to these violations.

3. What recommendations do you propose for stemming these violations? (you may make recommendations addressed to various actors and stakeholders)

**Moderator:** Mona Rishmawi, Chief, Rule of Law, Equality and Non-Discrimination Branch, Research and Right to Development Division, OHCHR

16.00-17.30

#### **Panel 4: Civil Society Perspectives**

Gary Foxcroft, Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network

George Thindwa, Activist, Malawi

Sashiprava Bindhani, Lawyer and Odisha State Government Commissioner for Information, India

Leo Igwe, Human Rights advocate, Nigeria

#### **Question(s):**

1. How have witchcraft beliefs and practice impacted the human rights of the group you advocate for?
2. Set out government's obligations in relation to these violations.
3. What recommendations do you propose for stemming these violations? (you may make recommendations addressed to various actors and stakeholders)

**Moderator:** Mona Rishmawi

## **Day Two**

9.00-10.30

#### **Panel 5: Ritual Attacks and Killings**

Kathryn Leslie, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on violence against children

Vicky Ntetema, Under the Same Sun, Tanzania

Pastor Peter Sewakiryanga,

Kyampisi Childcare Ministries, Uganda

Barrister James Ibor, Basic Rights Counsel, Nigeria

**Question(s):**

1. What is ritual killing and how is this related to witchcraft?
2. Set out government's obligations in relation to these violations.
3. What recommendations do you propose for stemming these violations? (you may make recommendations addressed to various actors and stakeholders)

**Moderator:** Adwoa Kufuor, Regional Adviser, Gender and Women's Rights, OHCHR (Regional Office for East Africa)

**PART 3 – Witchcraft in Regional Contexts**

10.30-11.45

**Panel 6: Regional focus – Africa**

Dr. Patricia Lund, Coventry University, UK  
Gertrude Hiwa, Malawi Law Reform Commission, Malawi  
Jehu Tom, Way to the Nations, Nigeria  
Sam Clarke, Standing Voice, UK/Tanzania

**Question(s):**

Focusing on the region being discussed:

1. What steps have you/your organization taken to successfully curb the violations stemming from witchcraft belief and practices?
2. What are the subsisting challenges?
3. What regionally-specific recommendations do you propose?

**Moderator:** Dr. Charlotte Baker, Lancaster University, UK

11.45-13.00

**Panel 7: Regional focus – Asia and Pacific**

Dr. Miranda Forsyth, Australian National University,  
Australia

Dr. Dinesh Mishra, Movement against Witchcraft - Andh  
Shraddha Nirmulan Samiti, India

Prof. Father Philip Gibbs, Divine Word University,  
Madang, Papua New Guinea

Avinash Patil, Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan  
Samiti (MANS), India

Serena Sasingian, Department of Justice and Attorney  
General, Papua New Guinea

**Question(s):** As above

**Moderator:** Dr. Charlotte Baker, Lancaster University

13.00-14.15

**Lunch break**

14.15-15.45

**Panel 8: Regional focus – Europe**

Leethen Bartholomew, University of Sussex, UK

Oladapo Awosokanre, Africans Unite Against Child Abuse  
(AFRUCA), UK

Detective Debbie Crowder - Metropolitan Police, UK

**Question(s):** As above

**Moderator:** Dr. Phillip Tahmindjis, Director, International  
Bar Association Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)

15.45-17:00

**Panel 9: Faith Based Organizations**

Dr. Steve Rasmussen, Africa International University,  
Kenya

Peter Ash, Founder/CEO Under the Same Sun, Canada  
Ojolu Ojot, Interim Assistant General Secretary, The  
Lutheran World Federation

Carolyn Gent, Stop Child Witchcraft Accusations  
Coalition, UK



Dr. Elizabeth O'Casey, International Humanist and Ethical Union, Geneva Delegation

**Question(s)**

1. What is your organization doing to address these issues?
2. What is left to be done by your organization? By other stakeholders?

**Moderator:** Adwoa Kufuor, Regional Adviser, Gender and Women's Rights, OHCHR (Regional Office for East Africa)

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|-------------|--|
| 17:00-17:15 | Coffee break   |
| 17:15-17:55 | <b>Presentation on Preliminary Outcomes</b> by Jose Parra, Research Associate, Mandate of the Independent Expert on enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism |
| 17.55-18.00 | <b>Closing Remarks</b> - Ikponwosa Ero on behalf of organizers and co-organizers   |
| 18:00       | <b>Reception:</b> Room : Salle des Dames. (Located here at Palais Wilson, same floor)  |

## Method of Work

- The **format of intervention** will follow the process of similar international meetings.
- Therefore **a limited number of presenters** will be asked to be expert panellists: responding to the identified questions and topics.
- Each session will have a **moderator**, who will introduce the topic as well as the expert panellists. The moderator will also facilitate the exchange of ideas among panellists on the one hand and between the panellists and all participants on the other hand. Finally the moderator will keep the time while making final remarks reflecting the main conclusions.
- Discussions under each agenda item will be open to all expert participants beginning with state parties, followed by UN experts and then civil society (NGOs, faith-based organizations and academics)
- In order to allow for the largest possible **substantive contributions** and to enable a more **interactive dialogue**, expert participants will be requested to limit their interventions under each topic **to no more than 2 to 3 minutes**
- It is highly recommended to all expert panellists and expert participants to bring **a full written version or summary of their intervention** to ensure effective and accurate incorporation in the outcome report. Furthermore, 3 extra copies are needed at the workshop for the translators and the rapporteur.

# Concept Note

## Background

In numerous countries around the world, witchcraft related beliefs and practices<sup>1</sup> have resulted in serious violations of human rights including, beatings, banishment, cutting of body parts, and amputation of limbs, torture and murder. Women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities particularly persons with albinism, are particularly vulnerable. Despite the seriousness of these human rights abuses, there is often no robust state led response. Often judicial systems do not act to prevent, investigate or prosecute human rights abuses linked to beliefs in witchcraft. This institutional failure perpetuates impunity.

Beliefs and practices related to witchcraft vary considerably between different countries and even within ethnicities in the same country. There is overall limited understanding of beliefs in witchcraft, how it may be practised in some cultures, and why. The Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Philip Alston, states in his 2009 Report that human rights abuses carried out due to beliefs in witchcraft have “not featured prominently on the radar screen of human rights monitors” and that “this may be due partly to the difficulty of defining ‘witches’ and ‘witchcraft’ across cultures - terms that, quite apart from their connotations in popular culture, may include an array of traditional or faith healing practices and are not easily defined. The fact remains, however, that under the rubric of the amorphous and manipulable designation of ‘witchcraft’, individuals (often those who are somehow different, feared or disliked) are singled out for arbitrary private acts of violence or for Government-sponsored or tolerated acts of violence.” (A/HRC/11/2, 2009). Currently, no normative framework or formal mechanism exists to conceptualize, record, monitor or respond to such violations (WHRIN, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> The concepts e.g. “witchcraft” and “witchcraft beliefs, practices and consequences,” used in this note are preliminary alone. They are indicative of the ideas been conveyed and are not being used as the final and only means of expressing those ideas. For these preliminary purposes, the term “witchcraft” is taken to include “muti” and similar ritual killings and ritual attacks.

The exact numbers of victims of such abuses is unknown and is widely believed to be underreported.<sup>2</sup> At the very least, it is believed that there are thousands of cases of people accused of witchcraft each year globally, often with fatal consequences, and others are mutilated and killed for witchcraft-related rituals.<sup>3</sup> The literature asserts that these numbers are increasing, with cases becoming more violent, the practices spreading, and new classes of victims being created (Adinkrah 2004, Bussien et al. 2011, Cohan 2011, Gardini 2013, Geschiere 2008, Horowitz 2014, Jorgensen 2014), although the difficulty in proving such claims quantitatively is acknowledged (Forsyth 2016). These practices are also increasingly a challenge for countries in the global North, mainly within migrant communities (Edwards 2013, Garcia 2013, Powles & Deakin 2012, *The Economist* 2015).

Witchcraft beliefs, practices and related consequences have been reported in the UN by various high level officials and experts—although from a specific perspective and often in a specific country and context. These include the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) on Violence against Children,<sup>4</sup> the Special Rapporteur (SR) on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the SR on freedom of religion or belief, the SR on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and the SR on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. Some experts have also sent communications to states on the matter including the SR on the independence of judges and lawyers, as well as the Independent expert on technical cooperation and advisory services in Liberia. The Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism has also broached the topic in her last two reports, and considers that a more holistic approach to the phenomena is necessary.

The workshop is ground-breaking as it is the first-ever to discuss witchcraft and human rights in a systematic and in-depth manner at the UN or

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, Karen McVeigh, Child witchcraft claims increasing as ‘hidden crime’ is investigated, 8 October 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/oct/08/child-witchcraft-claims-hidden-crime-met-police-under-reported> Also see, Ruth Evans, ‘Witchcraft abuse cases on the rise’, 11 October 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-34475424>

<sup>3</sup> See Philip Alston, “Of witches and robots: the diverse challenges of responding to unlawful killings in the twenty-first century”, *Macalester International*, vol. 28 (2012) and Jill Shnoebelen, Witchcraft allegations, refugee protection and human rights: a review of the evidence, UNHCR, Research paper No. 169, <http://www.unhcr.org/4981ca712.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See <http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/page/850>

international level. It will bring together UN Experts, academics and members of civil society to discuss the violence associated with such beliefs and practices and groups that are particularly vulnerable. It will highlight the various manifestations of witchcraft beliefs and practices, including accusations, stigma and ritual killings, before looking to identify good practices in combatting the phenomena. The meeting will also be an opportunity to discuss whether current legislative frameworks are sufficient to meet State legal duty to prevent, punish, investigate and provide remedies for harm caused by beliefs in witchcraft.

It will mark an important step towards mainstreaming the issue into the UN Human Rights system, whilst providing impetus and practical guidance to the numerous international and regional mechanisms, academics and civil society actors that have been working to raise awareness and understanding of these challenging issues.

## **Objectives and Expected Outcomes**

### **Overall Objective:**

- To enable greater understanding of witchcraft related beliefs and practices, and their impact on the enjoyment of human rights, with a view to developing solutions to prevent further abuses from taking place

### **Substantive objective:**

- discuss violence, highlight manifestation, identify good practice and discuss the adequacy of existing legal framework to ensure State legal duty.

### **Institutional objective:**

- mainstream the issue into the UN Human Rights System and provide practical guidance to relevant actors.

### **Outcome document/report:**

- An outcome document containing the substantive discussion as well as a synthesis of recommendations will be produced as an addendum of the annual report to the UN Human Rights Council of the UN Independent Expert on the full enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism and, thereafter, available for distribution in different languages .