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'Govt has not done enough for albinos'

By Lenganji Sikapizye
 Tue 16 Nov. 2010, 04:01 CAT [2416 Reads, 1 Comment(s)]



Queen Phiri - we have no voice

A LUSAKA youth says the government has not done enough to address issues affecting albinos. During a national workshop on albinism in Lusaka, Queen Phiri said albinos in the country did not have a voice.

"We people with albinism face a lot of challenges. From time immemorial we have had no platform from which to air our views. This is partly because there has been no voice to speak on behalf of people with albinism in this country," Phiri said yesterday.

Phiri said albinos were willing to work with the government in the quest to address their plight. And chairman of the National Voice for Albinism (NAVA) Charles Mushitu said the organisation wanted to see change in the way people perceived albinism in the country.

"We want to see a situation where people with albinism can also excel in life and take up leadership positions and fully participate in the decision making process. Just two weeks ago, Tanzania elected the first ever person living with albinism as a member of parliament after years of lobbying and sensitisation," Mushitu said.

Mushitu observed that the skin of most albinos were not healthy because of lack of sunscreen. "Look at most people living with albinism in this room. You will notice that their skins are not healthy. This is due to lack of usage of what we call sunscreen, a special lotion that protects people with albinism from sunburns, which if not properly managed can result in skin cancer," Mushitu said. "This lotion is quite expensive and it is beyond reach for most of our members. One tube costs not less than K150,000."

Community development deputy minister Friday Malwa said it was sad that people living with albinism were sometimes perceived as a cursed section of society.

"The mere birth of an albino is viewed as a curse and sometimes leads to divorce and tension in families and communities. This has contributed to albinos being marginalised in society, as a result people with albinism have been consigned to not being heard in our society. They consequently do not raise their voices to bring out their concerns," Malwa said.

He said cultural myths had also continued to disadvantage people living with albinism.

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"Due to cultural myths albinos have been classified as endangered species because their body parts are believed to be catalyst in business booming rituals and acts of Satanism," he said.

However, Malwa urged Zambians to accept people living with albinism as fellow human beings because their condition had nothing to do with cultural beliefs.

In Tanzania, albinos have become the favoured prey of traditional healers, who kill them to harvest their body parts for 'get-rich-quick concoctions'. However, this trend has been condemned in the strongest terms by governments and non-governmental organisations on the continent.

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