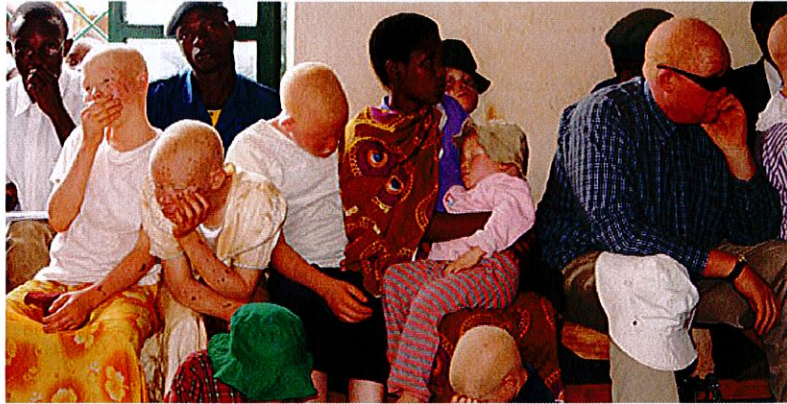


The East African

NEWS

Dar told: Resume trials of albino killers



Kazungu Kassim, right, head of a Burundi albino association, listens to proceedings inside a courtroom in Ruyigi, eastern Burundi, May 28. Twelve albinos have been murdered in neighbouring Burundi in the past year but Burundi 'does not appear to be afflicted with the same kind of judicial apathy' as Tanzania.

By KEVIN KELLEY (email the author)

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An international albino rights group is criticising Tanzanian authorities for failing to secure justice in the cases of albinos who have been slaughtered for their body parts.

"With the government unable or unwilling to protect them from the machetes of the witchdoctors' henchmen," the estimated 170,000 Tanzanians with albinism have "no place to hide and little reason to hope," declares the Canada-based campaigning group Under the Same Sun.

It is urging the Tanzanian government to order resumption of the trials of four suspected killers of albinos. The proceedings in Kahama and Shinyanga High Courts were recently suspended on the grounds that the courts have run out of funds.

Some Tanzanians are sceptical about that excuse, however. The National Post, a Canadian newspaper, last week quoted Tanzanian journalist Vicky Ntetema, who has worked for the BBC, as suggesting that the trials were stopped because the witchdoctors behind the albino killings are being protected by the police and government officials.

"This is the general feeling," Mrs Ntetema told The National Post. "The public is saying if you started the trial, it means you knew you had sufficient funds to complete the whole trial."

Al-Shaymaa Kwegyir, Tanzania's only albino MP, has said she expects the trials to resume "very soon." But Peter Ash, founder of Under the Same Sun, says the government has given no indication of such a move.

Mr Ash questions whether "there is any political will within this East African government to provide meaningful protection for its citizens with albinism."

Mr Ash met in April with Tanzanian Prime Minister Mzenge Pinda, who, along with President Jakaya Kikwete, had promised to bring the killers to justice.

Those promises "have not yet been fulfilled," Mr Ash says. He plans to travel to Tanzania next month to intensify pressure to halt what he describes as genocide against albinos.

At least four Tanzanians with albinism have been killed in the past month. The most recent victim was four-year-old Muanda Sita of Madilana village in the Bariadi District, Shinyanga region. Murderers armed with pangas hacked off the boy's legs as he screamed in agony, Mr Ash recounts.

At least 53 Tanzanians with albinism have been killed since 2007, according to police reports cited by Under the Same Sun. More than 90 people, including four police officers, have been arrested in connection with the killings, but none of the accused have been convicted.

This spreading evil has reached epidemic proportions," Mr Ash says, noting that 12 albinos have been murdered in neighbouring Burundi in the past year. But Burundi "does not appear to be afflicted with the same kind of judicial apathy" as Tanzania, Mr Ash adds.

He points out that nine Burundians have been convicted and are serving time for their role in those killings.