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DC comes to the rescue of shackled albino girl

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A young albino woman who had been shackled and locked up in a room for three years has finally been released following intervention by Muheza district commissioner (DC) Mathew Nasei.

Mariam Juma (29) had her feet chained and was confined to a tiny room by her now-deceased father, Juma Ngwatu, in a misguided attempt to keep her off the streets following an escalation in albino murders in the country.

That was three years ago, when violence against albinos was at its peak: when young men and women with skin disorder were hunted down and murdered for their body parts, which some believe have supernatural powers that can be harnessed for personal gains.

Since then, Juma had been bound to her small room at her family's home along Msikitini street in the district of Muheza in Tanga Region, according to sources close to the family.

Asked to confirm the allegations, Mariam's mother, Amina Mtunguja, defended her late husband's decision, saying she had continued to keep her daughter chained up for her own good.

According to Mtunguja, Mariam has been suffering from mental health problems since 1996 when she was just a standard seven student, and has gotten progressively worse over the last several years.

She added that, at her absolute worst, Mariam would sneak out of the house unguided and run off to local pubs where predatory men would get her drunk and then sexually assault her.

Mtunguja claimed that on several occasions unknown people had raped her daughter, prompting her husband to resort to using restraints to keep Mariam at home.

"Her mental disturbance got worse around 2008, and she would run away from home" began Mtunguja adding, "Several times we found her drunk and sexually violated."

"We didn't have a choice, we had to restrain her – it was for her own safety" insisted the mother of six whose five other children also suffer from albinism.

When DC Nasei arrived at the scene of the incident, he demanded that Mtunguja finds the keys to the shackles, and unchains the child immediately, despite her protesting that she didn't know where her husband had hidden the keys and couldn't find them.

Speaking after Mariam had been freed, Nasei said that such cruelty would not go unpunished, adding that the government would investigate the matter in an attempt to understand why a family would do such a thing to one of their own.

"As district leaders, this incident truly distresses us – we had no idea someone could go through this much suffering" intimated Nasei promising "We'll work to resolve this; however, our first priority is getting her (Mariam) treatment."

Another human rights activist, Josephat Torner, who is the coordinator for Youth With Disabilities Community Programme (YDCP), asked the government to pave the way for legal action against the victim's family, saying that what they did contravenes basic human rights, and is an infringement on Mariam's dignity.

"Even if albinos were being killed, you can not chain up a human being for that long" reiterated Torner adding "This was a gross abuse of her individual rights and it's going to affect her psychological development."

"I'm asking the government to take legal action against the perpetrators of this sadistic act", insisted Torner.

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN

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