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Tanzania to hang blood-drinking killer of albino girl

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By Fumbuka Ng'wanakilala;

DAR ES SALAAM (Reuters) - A man has been sentenced death by hanging for killing a five-year-old albino girl in Tanzania by hacking off her legs with a machete and then drinking her blood, media reported on Wednesday.

The High Court in the northern town of Mwanza on Tuesday convicted 50-year-old Kazimiri Mashauri after hearing he disappeared with the severed limbs and left her to die.

The girl's killing was one of a spate of attacks on the country's estimated 200,000 albinos in the past years, mostly in the remote northwest of the country near Lake Victoria, where superstition runs deep.

Albino hunters kill their victims and harvest their blood and body parts such as hair, genitals and limbs for potions.

Their body parts are prized in some regions of Tanzania, where witchdoctors say albinos -- who lack pigment in their skin, eyes and hair -- bring luck in love, life and business.

Al Shaymaa Kwegyir, Tanzania's first albino member of parliament, welcomed the conviction and praised the government's crackdown on the inhumane killings.

"The court ruling should serve as a lesson for others," Kwegyir told Reuters by phone from Tanga region where she is campaigning for a parliamentary seat.

"This is the second murder conviction for albino killers and I am very happy to say that there has been a notable decline in such killings in recent months."

In November, Tanzania's high court sentenced four men to death for butchering a 50-year-old albino man.

The Tanzania Albino Society fears there could be a new wave of albino killings in the east Africa's second largest economy ahead of elections on October 31.

Around 60 albinos have been killed for their body parts in Tanzania in the past two years, but campaigners say the actual numbers are likely much higher since many cases remain undocumented.

The killings have sullied Tanzania's reputation for relative calm in the region, and been condemned by the United Nations and European Union.

(Reporting by Fumbuka Ng'wanakilala; editing by Richard Lough)

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