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Tanzania's albino MP fears for life

2010-11-15 14:54

Dar es Salaam - Tanzania's first elected albino member of parliament fears his life could be in danger in the east African country where albino hunters kill their victims and use their blood and body parts for witchcraft.

Salum Khalfan Barwany said he may be threatened by an unknown group that has been tracking his movements since he was elected MP for the Lindi Urban constituency in southern Tanzania in an October 31 election.

"We have received information from good samaritans that a group of five people, some of them with military training, has been secretly pursuing me since I was elected MP," the lawmaker from the opposition Civic United Front party told Reuters by phone from Dodoma, where parliament sits.

"I have reported this matter to the police in Dar es Salaam and I hope they will take the necessary action."

At least 59 albinos have been killed since 2007 in Tanzania and their body parts sold for use in witchcraft, especially in the remote northwest regions of Mwanza and Shinyanga which are both gold mining regions where superstition is rife.

Witchdoctors tell their clients that the body parts will bring them luck in love, life and business.

Hunting and killing albinos

Albinos lack pigment in their skin, eyes and hair. There are around 170 000 albinos living in Tanzania.

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

Police said they had received reports the MP could be in danger.

"We are investigating the matter. It has been officially reported to us and the MP himself came personally to the police to give us his statement," said Temeke regional police commander David Miseme.

"I'm not sure what their motive is. It could be politically related, or it may be part of those gangs that

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have been hunting and killing albinos," said Barwany.

"There are several opposition candidates who won parliamentary seats, but why is this happening to me?"

"Not safe"

Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete appointed an albino MP, Al-Shaymaa Kwegyir, in 2008, but Barwany is the first albino legislator to be elected.

A Canada-based rights group said albinos were still living in fear in Tanzania despite a slowdown in killings.

"There has been a lull in the attacks compared to 2007, 2008 and 2009, but persons with albinism are still not safe in Tanzania up to now," said Vicky Ntetema, executive director of Under The Same Sun, an albino rights group.

"There is one case the attackers went out of their way to give first aid treatment to a victim to stop the bleeding, so they can come back next time and harvest another limb from the same person," she said.

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

In neighbouring Burundi, at least 11 albinos have been killed since last year. So far 13 people have been convicted, including one who received a life sentence.

- Reuters

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d.marais2008 - November 15, 2010 at 16:50

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No!!! How can they do race profiling!?! Naughty-naughty, are they not?

But true, killing off the BAD albino's make for GOOD luck to those who carry in their pockets diverse pieces of nose, ear, bum, toes, fingers, heart, lungs, liver, pancreas, kidneys, prostate gland (very popular), scalp, brains, tongue (especially if removed before the final blow to the brain, I was told.

Is there a connection somewhere here? South Africa does share the same anthem with Tanzania save for the unfortunate bit of "Die Stem" that was added. The same title, same words, same tune, same sad, funereal tempo.

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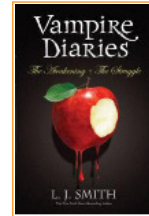
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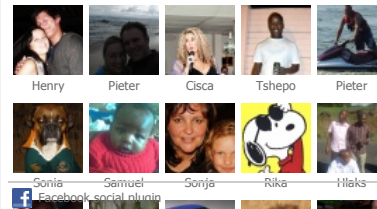
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