

## Connolly Bill on Albinism and East Africa Atrocities Passes House 418 to 1

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**March 10, 2010**

Legislation sponsored by Congressman Gerry Connolly (D-VA) that highlights the horrific murders and atrocities faced by men, women, and children with albinism in Tanzania and East Africa and calls on governments in the region to take action to stop the violence and bring the perpetrators to justice passed the U.S. House of Representatives Wednesday.

Connolly's legislation – H.R. 1088 – moved through the House committee process in less than two months and passed the House with broad bipartisan support by a vote of 418 to 1.



The Northern Virginia Congressman introduced the legislation in mid-January after meeting Mariamu Stanford, a young woman with albinism from a rural Tanzanian village who had both of her arms hacked off by villagers who then sold them for profit. Rural witch doctors in the region believe the limbs of those with albinism have supernatural properties and can be mixed in potions to bring the buyer good luck. The limbs are sold for as much as \$2,000 each, a king's ransom in East Africa.

More than 100 persons with albinism have been murdered in Tanzania and other parts of East Africa by profit-seeking criminals.

The horrors faced by Mariamu and the murders of others with albinism were brought to Congressman Connolly's attention by Northern Virginia residents concerned about albinism and the butchering of innocent men, women, and children.

Speaking on the House floor Tuesday, Connolly urged his colleagues "to join me and Mariamu Stanford in bringing international attention to this horrific abuse of human rights." He said his meeting with Mariamu and local families concerned about her plight and albinism in general "has moved me to take action."

Connolly's legislation:



- Condemns the murder and mutilation of people with albinism in East Africa;
- Urges governments in East Africa, particularly the governments of Tanzania and Burundi, to take immediate action to prevent further violence against persons with albinism;
- Calls for swift justice against those who have engaged in such reprehensible practices,

- Calls upon governments in East Africa, along with international organizations, other donors, and the United States, to actively support the education of people with albinism about the prevention of skin cancer and provide appropriate levels of assistance;
- And urges the United States to assist the governments of East Africa and other organizations to seek elimination of violence against people with albinism.

Connolly said Mariamu Stanford’s story “is one of fear, horror, and unbelievable courage that epitomizes the untold horrors men, women, and children with albinism have faced – and continue to face – in East Africa.



Along with the story of inhumane crime against Mariamu, Connolly related two other stories of murders in East Africa to his House colleagues:

- In November of 2008, a 6-year-old girl was shot dead in Burundi’s eastern province of Ruyigi, close to the border with Tanzania. Her attackers removed her head and limbs, leaving only her dismembered torso.
- In January of 2009, three men armed with machetes killed an 8-year-old boy in Burundi and smuggled his limbs to Tanzania. Every one of these stories border on the unbelievable and, quite frankly, turn my stomach as I hope they do yours.

“I applaud the dedicated group of local residents who brought Mariamu’s story and the stories of other atrocities against people with albinism in East Africa to my attention,” Connolly said. “With their help and the passage of this resolution today, maybe we can bring an end to these horrific and heinous crimes.”

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Video from the House floor debate can be viewed [here](#).

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*Connolly’s Statement on House floor follows:*

**CONGRESSMAN GERRY CONNOLLY  
FLOOR SPEECH ON H.R. 1088  
MARCH 9, 2010**

Madam/Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of House Resolution 1088.

House Resolution 1088 shines a light on the untold horrors men and women with albinism have faced—and continue to face—in East Africa, where human beings with albinism are butchered, and their body parts are sold for profit.

These acts against humanity are best told through the story of a brave Tanzanian mother – one of the few survivors of these attacks.

I had the honor of meeting this survivor of one of these attacks—a young woman from Tanzania named Mariamu Stanford... who epitomizes the essence of bravery.

These horrific acts, like the crime committed against Mariamu, are perpetuated by shamans who believe the body parts of people with albinism have magical powers and can be mixed in potions to bring the buyer good luck. Rural villagers have strong incentive to harvest the limbs of their neighbors with albinism because a single limb can sell for as much as \$2,000 -- a king's ransom in Tanzania's countryside.

Mariamu, who has albinism, is one of the few survivors of these horrific attacks. Her story is one of fear, horror, and unbelievable courage. She told me her story, through an interpreter, when we met in December in my office on Capitol Hill.

One night in October 2008, when Mariamu was asleep with her toddler son, a group of machete-yielding men from her village broke into her home and attacked her. They cut off both of her arms while she struggled, screamed, and shielded her young boy from the blows.

It was six long hours after the attack before Mariamu, who was 5-months pregnant, was able receive medical treatment. In the end, she also lost her unborn child, but she survived and is now relaying her story in the hopes that these brutal crimes against people with albinism will end.

Mariamu came to the U.S. for a visit thanks to the generosity of many, including some of my constituents from Northern Virginia with albinism and some of who are parents of children with albinism.

While she was here for nearly two weeks in December, Mariamu was fitted with prosthetic arms donated by the Orthotic Prosthetic Center in Fairfax, Virginia, and she underwent intensive physical therapy.

Mariamu is a rare survivor of a horrific and inhumane crime that is a growing concern in East Africa. More than 100 people with albinism have been butchered in the region, most of them women and young children.

In November of 2008, a 6-year-old girl was shot dead in Burundi's eastern province of Ruyigi, close to the border with Tanzania. Her attackers removed her head and limbs, leaving only her dismembered torso.

In January of 2009, three men armed with machetes killed an 8-year-old boy in Burundi and smuggled his limbs to Tanzania. Every one of these stories border on the unbelievable and, quite frankly, turn my stomach as I hope they do yours.

Not only do people with albinism face violence in parts of the world, but they also are at a higher risk for medical complications, such as skin cancer and poor vision, due to the lower melanin levels in their skin.

In East Africa's harsh sun, this is a lethal combination. But oftentimes, people with albinism have no choice but to expose themselves to the sun with little protection, as they must be outside to work, go to school, or attend to everyday business.

Unfortunately, the medical issues that people with albinism may face are the least of their worries. The threat of brutal violence looms over them at all times. Tanzanian Prime Minister Mizengo Peter Pinda has condemned the violent crimes against people with albinism, but judicial and enforcement barriers remain.

My meeting with Mariamu and local families concerned about her plight and albinism in general, has moved me to take action.

I am contacting President Obama and the State Department to urge them to place diplomatic pressure on Tanzania's federal and local governments to end these crimes against humanity and to provide education to dispel the myth that the body parts of those with albinism have supernatural properties.

I also believe we must look at providing humanitarian and medical assistance to people with albinism in East Africa, with a focus on Tanzania, where most of these brutal crimes have occurred.

To this end, I introduced House Resolution 1088, a resolution that recognizes the plight of people with albinism in East Africa, condemning their murder and mutilation, and advocating remedies to bring an end to this heinous and misguided behavior.

Specifically, House Resolution 1088 urges governments in East Africa, particularly the governments of Tanzania and Burundi, to take immediate action to prevent further violence against persons with albinism and to bring to swift justice those who have engaged in such reprehensible practices.

It also calls upon governments in East Africa, along with international organizations and other donors, including the United States, to actively support the education of people with albinism about the prevention of skin cancer and provide appropriate levels of assistance toward that end.

Lastly, it urges the United States to work with the governments of East Africa, and international organizations and other donors, to eliminate violence against people with albinism.

I urge my colleagues to join me and Mariamu Stanford in bringing international attention to this horrific abuse of human rights by voting yes on this measure.

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<http://connolly.house.gov/index.cfm?sectionid=44&sectiontree=6,44&itemid=317>