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We hope that with the measures taken by the authorities and the awareness that has been built among the public, we will not witness an increase in such acts during the run-up to the elections. Maybe they have already collected enough body parts.”

This is the essence of a statement by an official of an organisation for the protection of people living with albinism in Tanzania, in an interview with TBC, the state broadcaster, last Thursday.

He was reacting to the news of the arrest, prosecution, conviction and sentencing of a Kenyan man who had tried to sell a whole human, a fellow Kenyan, with albinism.

The story was told of the culprit luring the intended victim with false promises of getting him a job as a truck driver in Tanzania while in fact he was looking for a buyer in a country that has become infamous for the trafficking of body parts of albinos, which some people believe can be used to make potions that confer occult powers.

The allusion to the elections is a sad reminder that those who believe in the devilish practice (as well as those who may not believe but who see a chance to make an extra buck), will be more active

between now and late October, when the elections will be held.

Electoral success is one quest that is said to demand these body parts, alongside others, such as the desire to get rich quick (without working for a day) or to make Naomi Campbell fall hopelessly in love with you (without so much as a piece of granite to give her).

Where we are at is an uncertain place, as the man in the television interview said.

The lull that preceded the arrest of the Kenyan entrepreneur may have been occasioned by the draconian measures taken by the state after the heroic efforts of Vicky Mtetema of the BBC, but the apparent regionalisation of the traffic may mean that the whole East African region is now being sucked into this macabre trade, which hitherto was limited to Tanzania and Burundi.

The fight against the albino killers will not be easy because the evil we are targeting has more profound and involved origins than we care to admit, and as a result we choose to go the easy route, which is police action.

Yet we know that there is no police force in the world that can eradicate obscurantism, which I define as the total, committed and militant quest for unknowing that inhabits *homo africanus*, making this species the last to abandon the science of flight by winnowing-basket and internalise the magic of the light bulb.

With disinvestment in education taking the form of producing automatons who have swallowed half cooked templates that they are expected to regurgitate later without any digestion; with critical disputation all but outlawed and questioning minds ostracised; with such intellectual death and dearth of rationality, what does a society need to declare a permanent open season on albinos and other people who look different — the squint-eyed, the bald, the hunchbacked, the bowlegged...?

Greed. This is the one attribute that the peoples (hopefully soon “people”) of East Africa seem to be able to pass around in generous doses, Kenyans infecting Tanzanians, Tanzanians infecting Ugandans, Ugandans infecting Rwandans and Rwandans infecting Burundians, or the other way round, never mind the direction.

Think about this. At a time when the elites of our countries are comparing notes about property values in Arusha, Kampala and Kigali and the riffraff are building synergies in the selling of albinos, I’m not under the impression that the Tanzanian elites are dying to raise the reading culture of their children to the level of Kenyan children, for instance.

While the albino trafficker languishes in jail — he received 17 years — it is my hope that we will heed that chilling statement quoted at the beginning of this piece: Maybe they have already collected enough body parts. Maybe.

Jenerali Ulimwengu, chairman of the board of the Raia Mwema newspaper, is a political

commentator and civil society activist based in Dar es Salaam. jenerali@gmail.com