

Danger not yet over for the Great Lakes albinos

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By Anne Wanjiru in Kibondo, Tanzania

Thousands of albinos in East Africa, especially those living in Tanzania and Burundi, live in constant fear of their lives. The Red Cross societies in both countries are planning to increase their mass awareness campaigns to bring to an end the discrimination against people with albinism.

Six months after the launch of the [International Federation's advocacy report, Through albino eyes](#), the International Federation's Anne Wanjiru travelled to Tanzania to assess the current situation. In the middle of her mission, three murders confirmed that the occult-based practice continues in the region.

This set of four diaries highlights the suffering, and hope, of the Great Lakes albinos.

Seated in the middle of the crowd of mourners, one can hardly tell Daudi Tunze was once a strong, vibrant and happy father. His shoulders are rounded, his eyes are fixed on the floor and his hands hang weakly by his side. There is a cloud of silence and the mood is very sombre. He has just buried his son, Naimana Daudi, who was kidnapped, murdered and mutilated by suspected albino body-part traders.

Daudi's wife, Angelina, is also seated in the middle of the mass. She tightly clutches six-month-old baby, Felista, Naimana's sister. Though safely surrounded by neighbours and friends, the young mother is restless and clearly scared the attackers might return for her second albino child.

The local councillor, Pasco Kitabizi, emerges from the multitude to receive me. I spot one or two local Red Cross volunteers here to offer psychosocial support. Pasco explains the circumstances surrounding the killing of the boy.

"There has not been such an incident in this area for the past three years. The last attempt was in a nearby village where the attackers tried to get albino children. The killers did not manage to and escaped when the mother's screams attracted the attention of neighbours. This killing has shocked the entire Kibondo region," says Pasco.

This is the first albino killing this year following a six-month lull. It has heightened fears that the occult-based practice is continuing and that the danger for albinos is far from over. The last reported killing was that of a 10-year-old boy in Geita district in Mwanza region on 21 October 2009.

The police were swift in responding and four suspects were arrested in connection with the murder. It was a welcome reaction that confirms the decision of the authorities to deal swiftly and severely with the people responsible.

Recently, the United States Congress passed, almost unanimously, [a bill to end the plight of the albino people](#) in Eastern Africa – particularly in Tanzania and Burundi. The legislation is a call to both governments to stop the violence and bring the perpetrators to justice. Last year, four Tanzanian men were sentenced to capital punishment for their involvement in albino killings and the trade of albino body parts.

The occult-based killings began in 2007. They are particularly rife in the Kigoma and Mwanza regions on the shores of Lake Tanganyika and Lake Victoria. They are also common in the gold mine areas of Shinyanga. Some fishermen and miners believe that magical powers will provide a better harvest. They take the albino body parts to witch doctors who use them as talismans for their potions.

Back on the compound and Pasco points to the hole on the wall of Daudi's mud hut where the attackers gained access to the house.

"One of them entered through this hole and let the other in. We suspect the kidnappers sprayed a sleeping drug that cast the whole family into an abnormally deep sleep. They say they did not hear a thing," adds Pasco.

Naimana's body was discovered about 300 metres away from the house. The area still has a patch of dried blood.

"He was found lying lifeless here. His left hand and leg were missing. He must have bled to death. It was horrifying for the family when they discovered him in the early hours of the morning," says Mzee Baizwe, the Red Cross chairman of Kibondo branch, who has also joined the mourners.

The family buried him just behind their house for the safety of his body. Albino body part traders are known to excavate victims to acquire the remaining organs. Daudi's family is reluctant to relocate to a safer house in the town's centre until they are sure that Naimana's grave is secure.

"We are organizing to have concrete poured onto the grave as soon as possible. People who engage in this terrible practice might dig him out. They will not stop until they have all the body parts they need," adds Pasco.

Angelina was waiting another 12 months for Naimana to turn five so that she can take him to the Kabanga School for disabled children in Kasulu, almost 150 kilometres from their village. Supported by the Red Cross, the school not only offers education for disabled children, but also provides shelter and protection to albino children and mothers in the Kigoma region.

Sadly, Naimana's life came to an abrupt and tragic end before his mother could find a safe place for him.

Help the albinos

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On behalf of the albinos, thank you for supporting our work.

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