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LEGAL AID BOARD

Democratic Republic of Congo - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 25 June 2009

Information of prevalence of witchcraft/prophetic beliefs in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

The *US Department of State's* annual report on religious freedom in the DRC states

“As in past reporting periods, there were reports of incidents of individuals attacked, tortured, killed, or driven from their homes when they were accused of being "witches." While "witch" is an imprecise term that is often applied to persons with developmental, behavioral, and psychological problems, there is a common belief that some persons have the power to cast spells on others or are possessed by demons. Accusations of witchcraft can cause widespread fear in a community. For example, in May 2008, according to MONUC, three persons were killed in Bandundu Province on suspicion of being witches. Such actions commonly follow a death that family members attribute to the work of a witch.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of adults killing children accused of being witches. However, in Kinshasa in January 2008, a woman and other family members attempted to burn alive her 7-year-old stepson who they accused of being a witch after his father died in an automobile accident. Police placed the boy in protective custody. There were also reports of parents abandoning or withholding food from children accused of being witches.” (US Department of State (19 September 2008) *Congo, Democratic Republic: "International Religious Freedom Report 2008)*

A 2006 report on child welfare in the DRC from *Human Right Watch* states:

“Accusations of witchcraft and belief in the ability to cause harm to others through sorcery have existed in the DRC since before colonial rule, according to numerous Congolese we interviewed who are familiar with child sorcery cases. They reported that the major difference today is the age of the accused, and the number and location of the accusations. In the past, it was usually a widow or a woman who had remained single, not children, who were accused of sorcery. Accusations were usually made against rural women, who were made to live in relative isolation often at the edge of a village for fear that they would harm others. In the last fifteen years, however, children living in urban areas have become the primary targets of witchcraft allegations. Each week in the DRC, hundreds of children are accused of sorcery and endure abuse at the hands of their accusers normally extended family members but, increasingly, self-proclaimed prophets or pastors as well.

In tandem with the increasing number of children accused of sorcery has been the creation of churches that specialize in the exorcism of evil spirits from the "possessed." These glises de rveil or churches of revival combine prayers,

fasting and abuse in "deliverance" ceremonies to rid children of "possession." Approximately 2,000 churches perform "deliverance" ceremonies in Mbuji-Mayi and an even larger number operate in Kinshasa.[118] Some of these churches and their leaders have attracted large followings and have become lucrative businesses. Although the deliverance ceremonies are reportedly performed for free, in reality, parents or guardians are strongly "encouraged" to make a financial donation or give a gift to the church in exchange for deliverance of a child. In addition, deliverance ceremonies are a way to attract new church members who may become regular contributors at Sunday services." (Human Rights Watch (3 April 2006) *What Future? Street Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo*)

The *UK Home Office* COI report on the DRC from January 2009, in section 25, states:

"MONUC reported that on 27 October 2007 in South Kivu, fifty-seven civilians including 20 women, accused of practising witchcraft, were arbitrarily arrested in Luvungi 58km north of Uvira, illegally detained, subjected to ill-treatment and subsequently transferred to Lemera 80km north of Uvira, by elements of the FARDC 12th Integrated Brigade with the complicity of local traditional leaders. It was reported that the 57 were detained under very inhumane conditions at the residence of the traditional leader (Mwami) of the Bafulero tribe to await tests to determine if they were indeed involved in witchcraft. All were released after the intervention of UN Human Rights Officers, and most were transported back to Luvungi. As Congolese law does not recognise witchcraft as an offence, therefore the arrest of the 57 civilians was completely arbitrary; the Mwami's action was illegal and is punished under Article 57 of the Penal Code. [56cu]" (UK Home Office (27 January 2009) *Congo, Democratic Republic: "Country of Origin Information Report; Democratic Republic of the Congo"*)

The *US Department of States* annual report on the DRC states:

"Authorities took no action during the year against the mwami (local chief), other traditional leaders, or FARDC soldiers involved in the arbitrary and inhumane detention and ill-treatment of 57 civilians accused of witchcraft at the mwami's private residence in Luvungi, South Kivu Province, for four days in October 2007[...]

[...]The UNJHRO reported that on March 27, FDLR forces allegedly killed three residents of Kabunga, North Kivu, whom they accused of poisoning their commander and practicing witchcraft. No action had been taken against them by year's end." (US Department of State (25 February 2009) *Congo, Democratic Republic: "Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2008"*)

A report from the *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre* regarding North Kivu states:

"Reports of witchcraft were rare, and when reported, interviewees said that it was used by individuals to gain advantage over others. Some key informants considered witchcraft to be rife. Witchcraft was also reported by health

practitioners to be the first recourse to manage illness.” (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (formerly Global IDP Project) (30 September 2008) *Congo, Democratic Republic: "Escalating displacement in North Kivu despite ceasefire agreement"*)

A 2008 report from *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child* states:

“Among all these forms of violence, those inflicted upon so-called “witch” children have taken on disturbing proportions. Fuelled by poverty, mystical beliefs and the proliferation of religious sects, they now spare no urban area, however small, and often leave children bereft of protection. 152. Such is the case in the town of Kindu, in the province of Maniema, in the eastern part of the country, which has less than 250,000 inhabitants but where, in 2006, the association for the Protection of Abandoned Women and Children (Association pour la sauvegarde des enfants et des femmes abandonnées (ASEFA) counted 539 so-called “witch” children, 146 of them girls, being held in churches or in the homes of pastors where they were subjected to forced fasting and all manner of mistreatment on the pretext of exorcising them (breaking the spell). Of these, 537 (99.6 per cent) are from very low-income families.” (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (24 July 2008) *Congo, Democratic Republic: "Consideration of Reports submitted by States Parties under Article 44 of the Convention; Second periodic reports of States parties due in 1997; Democratic Republic of the Congo [CRC/C/COD/2]"*)

References

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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