



Children Being Killed for Human Sacrifices in Uganda

*By J.S. von Dacre
12 August 2019*

Bloodcurdling screams – the kind that drives a shiver across your skin – echoed in the distance. A World Vision director in Uganda, Obed, sped towards where the cries emanated from. His steps faltered as he stumbled upon a sight that would never grant him peace again – not for as long as he lives. There, in the clearing, a desperate mother clung to the lifeless body of her 8-year-old son. His decapitated body hung flimsily in her arms as she sobbed violently. The child had been killed as a human sacrifice by witch doctors just moments earlier.

The scene may sound like something from the pages of some macabre novel. Yet, stories like these are very much alive and thriving in some parts of Uganda and the media in Uganda is awash with stories of gruesome accounts of child sacrifice.

Witchcraft has been practised locally for hundreds of years, with animal sacrifices being customary. Rooted in traditional beliefs, socio-economic, and cultural factors, it is believed that these rituals can enable an individual to become rich or disease-free. In a growing trend, however, witch doctors have claimed that their work is far more potent when the “pure” blood of a child is offered up to the deities. Human blood and body parts, in particular children’s, are considered to be of more worth than animals.

The grisly acts are done whilst the child still alive. It is rare for any of the youngsters to survive the mutilation and anguish they are predestined to endure. During the ritual, body parts, facial features, or genitalia may be removed. As witch doctors tend to seek out children with no markings, more parents have resorted to measures such as ear-piercing and male circumcision in a feeble attempt to make their offspring appear imperfect.

In desperately impoverished communities rife with superstition, children from very poor families are more vulnerable to being kidnapped by the perpetrators.

Rachel Bentley is the International Director of Children on the Edge, a charity that has set up child protection teams within slum communities of Uganda to protect children from all types of abuse, including child sacrifice. With a network of social workers, police, and social services, their teams have been successful in eradicating the practice of child sacrifice in some communities.

“Ignorance and poverty drive this terrible practice. The mistaken belief is that the sacrifice of humans, in particular children, will bring prosperity. The abundance of children – living and freely roaming in poor slum communities – means that they can be easily abducted for such ceremonies,” Bentley explained.

“There needs to be education and awareness-raising, protection at community level for children – particularly in slum communities – and specific and stringent legislation enacted. Our organisation is working on all of these three areas.”

In the past decade, the media, police, and the government of Uganda, has cited the sacrifice of children in Uganda as a major child protection concern. Despite this, there are currently no specific laws that relate directly to the crime.

“Children on the Edge and other civil society organisations (CSO’S) are trying to introduce specific legislation in Uganda on child sacrifice,” Bentley said.

“The crime of human sacrifice needs to be adequately represented as an offence within its own right and sentences need to be strict, stringent, and non-negotiable. Currently, there is not adequate legislation to adequately bring perpetrators of this offence to justice. Child sacrifice cases are prosecuted under the Penal Code as murder if a child is murdered. However, if a child is severely mutilated and not murdered, the law offers inadequate protection. There needs to be stand-alone legislation for human sacrifice – a specific law enacted for the prohibition and prevention of human sacrifice.”

World Vision has reported that 87 cases of child sacrifice were registered between 2006 and 2014 nationwide in Uganda. Yet, since many child sacrifices are not reported, these figures underestimate the true number of murders that are being committed. Of these, only 23 were brought before the High Court. And since 2006, over the 8-year period, no more than 2 people have been convicted for the crime.