



United Nations Human Rights Council, 2nd Session (25 February – 22 March 2013)

Item 3 General Debate

Friday 8 March 2013

Speaker: BHA, IHEU, and CFI representative, Roy Brown

Witch-hunts and the Fear of Witchcraft

Mr President,

The fear of witchcraft is driving a wave of human rights abuses across many parts of the world. Many governments have caved in to witchcraft fears by failing to uphold, protect, and defend the rights of persons alleged to be witches, and by making witch hunts state policy.

In many countries, witchcraft related moral panic and hysteria target poor and vulnerable members of the population, particularly women, children, elderly persons, and people living with disabilities. The fear of witches is causing mob violence, death, internal displacement, xenophobia, and extra-judicial killings.

People suspected of witchcraft are attacked, dispossessed of their property and exiled from their homes and communities in Cameroon, Gambia, Tanzania, Zambia, Lesotho, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Burkina Faso, India, and Papua New Guinea.

Alleged witches are tortured and lynched by mobs, prosecuted, imprisoned, or executed in Malawi, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, and Central African Republic for committing imaginary crimes.

Witch hunting individuals and groups operate with impunity in Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sierra Leone. They exploit popular fears of malevolent magic and spirit possession for political or financial gain. Witch hunters subject alleged witches to a 'trial by ordeal', to inhuman and degrading treatment in the name of exorcism.

Mr President, witchcraft is an imaginary offence and exists only in the minds of believers. Even those claiming to have such powers use only trickery and psychological means to impress believers. But the vast majority of those accused of witchcraft have never claimed such powers.

We are calling for the decriminalization of witchcraft in Saudi Arabia, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic. We urge the Council to take up cases of witchcraft and related abuse with concerned States and adopt proactive measures to end the modern day witch hunts ravaging too many parts of the globe.

Thank you, sir.