

AFRUCA PROPOSAL FOR A UK LAW AGAINST DIAGNOSING CHILDREN AS WITCHES

PUBLIC E-CONSULTATION

Dear Colleagues,

You may be aware of recent media interests in cases involving children accused of witchcraft in our community here in the UK. AFRUCA has been at the forefront of campaigns to stop the abuse of African children diagnosed as witches in the country. We have now been approached by MPs and other national charities to work with them to campaign for a law against diagnosing children as witches.

Background

AFRUCA's concern in this area is the violation of the rights of children involved. Our interest does not extend to people's beliefs or their faiths. Our work as an organisation is predicated on the need to safeguard the vulnerable children in our community. Our view is also that all places of worship must be sanctuaries for children, that no matter the religion, children must feel safe and be safe in a place of worship. Based on our work and on information provided by other community organisations, there are numerous instances of abuse perpetrated on children who have been diagnosed by Pastors or other people as witches or as possessed by the devil. These include:

- **Psychological and emotional abuse** in the form of verbal abuse, curses, and the knowledge that one is hated by everyone because one is a witch. The self torture that follows the belief that one is a witch responsible for wicked acts on people.
- **Physical abuse** – to beat the devil out, but also to punish. Includes beating with heavy implements and brooms, stamping on stomachs, kicking, punching, starving in the form of fasting. This can go on for days on end.
- **Neglect.** Isolation from others. Lack of care, attention, including medical attention. Sometimes children miss education or are not able to concentrate at school because of the abuses highlighted above
- **Sexual Abuse.** In some cases, the isolation makes victims prone to additional sexual abuse in the hands of opportunists, since no one cares what happens to them.

Child Abuse linked to witchcraft can occur in some of our churches in different ways:

- Once a child is diagnosed by the Pastor, everyone else believes this is the case. There is therefore the risk of all the forms of abuse identified above occurring, not necessarily perpetrated by that church, but sanctioned by it. Diagnosing a child as a witch gives the lee-way for abuse.
- Some churches might practice abusive exorcism rites on the child which can cause extreme harm and suffering and even lead to death (eg Victoria Climbié)
- Once a child is diagnosed as a witch, only the Pastor can “deliver” that child. This means that the stigma of witchcraft stays until that child is “healed” or “delivered”.
- If the pastor is unable to deliver that child, then the stigma remains forever. In some extreme instances, some pastors have prescribed death as the only way out.

It is very disheartening to know that most of the children diagnosed as witches or as possessed by the devil are some of the most vulnerable children in our community. The recent DFES research proves this is the case. These are:

- Children with disability including autism, epilepsy, downs syndrome, dyslexia etc
- Children living away from home in private fostering situations as well as in domestic servitude situations
- Children living with a step parent, with one of the natural parents absent or dead
- Children whose parents have been diagnosed as witches
- Children who are “naughty” or have challenging behaviour

It is equally distressing to know that African children in the UK are the ones most prone to abuse as a result of accusations of witchcraft. As highlighted above, the effects can be very devastating on the child involved. AFRUCA believes that efforts need to be made to protect these vulnerable children from harm. We have

publicly called for a law to make it an offence to diagnose a child as a witch or to perform exorcism rites on a child. We now want to work with others to campaign for this law to be implemented.

This is what we are asking for:

- Make it an offence for anyone to call a child a witch or describe a child as possessed by the devil
- Make it an offence for anyone to carry out any form of ritual or exorcism rite on a child because they are a witch
- Make it an offence to force a child to fast because they are a witch
- Make it an offence to send a child outside the UK (including other European countries) to be exorcised because they are a witch
- Make it an offence to send a child abroad to be prayed for to die or be killed because they are a witch.
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As members of our community, we want to know what you think

- Do you support our proposal for a law against diagnosing a child as a witch?
- Is there any aspect of our proposal you do not agree with and why?
- Do you see any problems with enforcing the above proposal if it becomes law?
- Are there other issues we need to bear in mind in calling for such a law?
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Please let us know. Your input into this process will be very much appreciated. You can send us an email at info@afruca.org or call us on 0207 7042261 to discuss further. If you would like to respond to this public consultation but would like to keep it confidential, please send us a letter by post. Our address is below.

Thank You

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AFRUCA - Promoting the rights and welfare of African children