

Bringing the shocking issue of witchcraft under the UN spotlight

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Trade in albino body parts is big business in certain countries with the 'going rate' around £75,000.

Witchcraft-related beliefs and practices have resulted in serious violations of human rights including beatings, banishment, cutting of [body parts](#), and amputation of limbs, torture and murder.

There are thousands of cases of people accused of witchcraft each year globally, often with fatal consequences, and others are mutilated and killed for witchcraft-related rituals.

Women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities and people with albinism, a genetic disorder which impairs the ability to create pigment in the body, are particularly vulnerable.

In the last decade, 528 attacks on people with albinism have been reported in 28 countries.

Now a team, led by Lancaster University, have enabled the shocking issue, which includes ritual killings, to come under the microscope for the first time at international level.

A UN Witchcraft and Human Rights Expert Workshop will take place at UN headquarters in Geneva on September 21 and 22 with a multi-agency approach.

Dr Charlotte Baker, who has published widely on albinism in Africa, Lancaster University honorary graduate and human rights advocate Gary Foxcroft and Dr Sam Spence, who completed a PhD in Law at Lancaster, have worked with UN Independent Expert on Albinism Ikponwosa Ero to ensure the extent of the atrocity is heard at UN level.

The workshop will address the large-scale human rights issue that has by and large slipped under the radar of governments, NGOs and academics.

Despite the seriousness of these human rights abuses, there is often no robust state-led response.

Often judicial systems do not act to prevent, investigate or prosecute human rights abuses linked to beliefs in witchcraft.

The workshop is ground-breaking as it is the first-ever to discuss witchcraft and [human rights](#) in a systematic and in-depth manner at the UN or international level.

It will bring together UN Experts, academics and members of civil society to discuss the violence associated with such beliefs and practices and groups that are particularly vulnerable.

Dr Baker said: "The workshop will mark an important step towards mainstreaming the issue into the UN Human Rights system, whilst providing impetus and practical guidance to the numerous international and regional mechanisms, academics and civil society actors that have been working to raise awareness and understanding of these challenging issues."

Gary Foxcroft said: "This is the first time the UN has properly recognised the scale of the problem and the need to bring together experts from across the world to identify all the challenges and solutions. Our goal is a

UN Special Resolution for the UN Human Rights Council to recognise the scale of the problem, provide a clearly articulated outline of the problem and recommendations. We want [people](#) to feel inspired and to go back to their countries and know that they are not alone. This is a major step forwards."

Provided by Lancaster University

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