



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice

## Nigeria

### Nigeria – NGA40154 – Witchcraft in Nigeria – Suspected Witches in Anambra State – Treatment and State Protection of suspected Witches

1 June 2012

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#### 1. Do Igbos in Nigeria believe in witchcraft?

There is limited information on the practice of witchcraft among ethnic Igbo. According to one source, witchcraft among the Igbo is known as “amosu” or “ngbasi” depending on which Igbo dialect one speaks.<sup>1</sup> Witchcraft practices can be divided into two orders: a higher order known as “ekpinan” and a lower order known as “ifut.”<sup>2</sup> The higher order of witchcraft is more expensive and involves native doctors who use their spiritual powers to protect themselves and their clients against the interferences of witches, usually of the lower order.<sup>3</sup> One source indicates that the belief and practice of witchcraft among southern Igbo is rare, but continues to exist in western and the northern Igbo communities.<sup>4</sup>

#### 2. Are there any reports of suspected witches being harmed in Anambra State? If so, by whom and in what ways?

Limited information was found on the treatment of suspected witches in Anambra State. The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada documented numerous media reports of ritual killings carried out in various Nigerian states, including Anambra.<sup>5</sup> A UN report from 2009, documented that over 30 priests were arrested in 2004 when 50 mutilated bodies used for

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<sup>1</sup> Pearce, O, n.d., ‘The Spirit of Competition: A Conduit to the Modernity of Witchcraft Among Some Igbo Educated Elite’, *Scribd*, p 26 <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/44862855/%E2%80%9CThe-Spirit-of-Competition%E2%80%9D-A-Conduit-to-the-Modernity-of-Witchcraft-Among-Some-Igbo-Educated-Elite>> Accessed 29 May 2012

<sup>2</sup> Pearce, O, n.d., ‘The Spirit of Competition: A Conduit to the Modernity of Witchcraft Among Some Igbo Educated Elite’, *Scribd*, p 26 <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/44862855/%E2%80%9CThe-Spirit-of-Competition%E2%80%9D-A-Conduit-to-the-Modernity-of-Witchcraft-Among-Some-Igbo-Educated-Elite>> Accessed 29 May 2012

<sup>3</sup> Pearce, O, n.d., ‘The Spirit of Competition: A Conduit to the Modernity of Witchcraft Among Some Igbo Educated Elite’, *Scribd*, p 26 <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/44862855/%E2%80%9CThe-Spirit-of-Competition%E2%80%9D-A-Conduit-to-the-Modernity-of-Witchcraft-Among-Some-Igbo-Educated-Elite>> Accessed 29 May 2012

<sup>4</sup> Wendl, T and Obi Oguejio J, eds, *Exploring the Occult and Paranormal in West Africa*, Berlin: LIT Verlag, Google Books, p. 21

<<http://books.google.com.au/books?id=s5WN2HcwpNoC&lpg=PA21&ots=NuRkF2a0qk&dq=Igbos%20is%20known%20as%20%E2%80%98amosu%E2%80%99%20%2B%20witchcraft&pg=PR4#v=onepage&q=witchcraft%20is%20not%20common%20among%20the%20southern%20Igbo&f=false>> Accessed 29 May 2012

<sup>5</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005, *Nigeria: Prevalence of ritual murder and human sacrifice and reaction by government authorities*, 22 July UN Refworld website <<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/440ed7372.html>> Accessed 29 May 2012

ritual sacrifices were found near shrines in Okija, Anambra State.<sup>6</sup> The priests were accused of committing human sacrifices and using body parts for ritual purposes.<sup>7</sup>

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that witchcraft beliefs are widespread throughout Nigeria and that people accused of witchcraft are subjected to violence and death. In 2004, it was found that at least 25 accused witches died by trial-by-ordeal.<sup>8</sup> Recent reports also suggest an increase in the number of children being accused of practicing witchcraft. A UNHCR report in January 2011 stated that “witchcraft allegations against children have become the focus of increased international attention in recent years.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in 2010, the US State Department reported that “the torturing and killing of children accused of witchcraft resulted in numerous deaths during the year.”<sup>10</sup>

The media has reported on the public’s discontent with the government’s lack of acknowledgement of the killings and accusations of witchcraft.<sup>11</sup> According to two local NGOs, Stepping Stones Nigeria (SSN) and the Child’s Right And Rehabilitation Network CRARN, attackers drove nails into children’s heads, cut off fingers, tied children to trees, and abandoned them in the jungle for allegedly practicing witchcraft.<sup>12</sup> *The Global Post* also claims that the campaign against ‘witches’ has been pursued by preachers associated with small Christian sects that also incorporate some animist Nigerian beliefs.<sup>13</sup> According to the article, preachers sometimes draw on the community’s fears to denounce specific children as witches, leading to abuse, abandonment and murder.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Are there any reports of men in Nigeria being suspected of being witches?

There are no reports of men being suspected of witchcraft, but there is general information about the treatment of accused witches in Nigeria. Question 1 and 3 of RRT *Country Advice NGA39704* of 2012 provides information on the practice and treatment of witchcraft in Nigeria more broadly.<sup>15</sup> According to the advice, there have been an increasing number of children who have been accused of witchcraft. Those suspected of practicing witchcraft have been subject to torture, discrimination and death.

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) 2009, *Witchcraft allegations, refugee protection and human rights: a review of the evidence*, <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=4981ca712&query=witch>> Accessed 28 May 2012

<sup>7</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005, *Nigeria: Prevalence of ritual murder and human sacrifice and reaction by government authorities*, 22 July 2005, <<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/440ed7372.html>> - Accessed 29 May 2012

<sup>8</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) 2009, *Witchcraft allegations, refugee protection and human rights: a review of the evidence*, p. 37 <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=4981ca712&query=witch>> Accessed 28 May 2012

<sup>9</sup> UK Home Office 2012, *Nigeria: Country of Information (COI) report*, 6 January <<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/policyandlaw/coi/nigeria/>> Accessed 28 May 2012

<sup>10</sup> US Department of State 2011, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010 – Nigeria*, 8 April,

<sup>11</sup> US Department of State 2011, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010 – Nigeria*, 8 April,

<sup>12</sup> US Department of State 2011, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010 – Nigeria*, 8 April,

<sup>13</sup> Binder B, 2012, ‘Nigeria’s ‘Witch Children’ find refuge at Centre,’ *The Global Post*, 23 January, <<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/africa/nigeria/120117/nigerias-witch-children-find-refuge-at-center>> Accessed 31 May 2012

<sup>14</sup> Binder B, 2012, ‘Nigeria’s ‘Witch Children’ find refuge at Centre,’ *The Global Post*, 23 January, <<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/africa/nigeria/120117/nigerias-witch-children-find-refuge-at-center>> Accessed 31 May 2012

<sup>15</sup> RRT, *Country Advice NGA39704*, January 2012

#### 4. What is the level of state protection for those suspected of being witches (and harmed or threatened by non-state actors)?

Information indicates that the level of state protection is undermined by official hostility towards witchcraft and police corruption. According to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, “local authorities (as opposed to formal governmental officials) in Nigeria often treat witchcraft as a crime punishable by death.”<sup>16</sup> However, UNHCR indicated that “cults and secret societies were widespread, but that protection within Nigeria and police assistance would generally be available, although it could not be “fully rule[d] out that a person being victimized or threatened by members of a secret cult would at all times be able to find safety.”<sup>17</sup>

According to the UNHCR, senior police officers including an Assistant Inspector General of Police and a former governor were implicated in the 2004 killings which resulted in 25 deaths.<sup>18</sup> The US State Department has also documented that police occasionally beat children accused of witchcraft. In July 2009 police reportedly entered a shelter that held 150 children accused of witchcraft and subsequently beat children and arrested staff members.<sup>19</sup>

Previous country information on state protection in Nigeria indicates that corruption and human rights violations are widespread within the Nigerian police and security forces. A report by the UK Home Office claimed that the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) “committed human rights abuses and generally operated with impunity in the apprehension, illegal detention, and sometimes execution of criminal suspects.”<sup>20</sup> Likewise, in 2012, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that the NPF was “implicated in frequent human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, and extortion-related abuses.”<sup>21</sup>

Question 4 RRT *Country Advice NGA39704* of 2012 discusses state protection in Nigeria more broadly.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2002, *Nigeria: The belief in witchcraft*, NGA39321.E, 6 September, UNCHR Refworld Website <<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3f7d4ddf23.html>> Accessed 31 May 2012

<sup>17</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) 2009, *Witchcraft allegations, refugee protection and human rights: a review of the evidence*, p. 36

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<sup>19</sup> US Department of State 2011, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010 – Nigeria*, 8 April, Section 6

<sup>20</sup> UK Home Office 2012, *Nigeria: Country of Information (COI) report*, 6 January, p.33

<<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/policyandlaw/coi/nigeria/>> Accessed 28 May 2012

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch 2012, *World Report 2012- Nigeria*, <<http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-nigeria>> Accessed 31 May

<sup>22</sup> Question 4 RRT *Country Advice NGA39704* of 2012 discusses state protection in Nigeria more broadly.



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