



Uganda - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 12 February 2010.

Is there a history in Uganda of ritual killings? Are any groups (religious, cults, secret societies militias etc) known for this practice? Reasons for ritual killings Information on such groups: objectives, faith, rituals, leadership, membership, history and current situation in Uganda. Information on the treatment of those who are members or are perceived to be members of such groups by the government and/or society. Penalties for engaging in ritual killings? What steps have been taken by the government to prevent or limit this practice? Is ritual killing limited to specific geographical areas, or particular ethnic or religious groups?

An article from the Kampala-based newspaper *The Observer* states:

“In 2008, the print and electronic media was awash with horrifying stories of children murdered for ritual purposes. According to the Uganda Police Annual Crime Report of 2008, the murder of children for ritual purposes rose by over 800%, from 3 cases reported in 2007, to 25 cases reported and investigated in 2008. In the first quarter of 2009, 18 cases of this crime were reported to the Uganda Police Force.” (The Observer (Kampala) (3 September 2009) *Uganda: Child Sacrifice Prevention is the Answer*)

In a section titled “Children” the 2009 *United States Department of State* country report on Uganda states:

“There were increased reports of the ritual sacrifice of children during the year. For example, on December 4, in Masaka District, the Magistrates' Court charged businessman Godfrey Kato Kajuba with the October 26 ritual murder of 12-year-old Joseph Kasirye. Kajuba was remanded to prison. On October 27, police also arrested Moses Musisi, Umar Kateragga, and Mariam Nabukeera after they confessed that they had killed Kasirye on Kajubi's orders. The case was pending at year's end.” (United States Department of State (25 February 2009) *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Uganda*)

An article from the UK-based newspaper *The Observer* comments on the rise of ritualistic murders in Uganda as follows:

“Uganda has been shocked by a surge in ritualistic murders and human sacrifice, with police struggling to respond and public hysteria mounting at each gruesome discovery. In 2008 more than 300 cases of murder and disappearances linked to ritual ceremonies were reported to the police with 18 cases making it to the courts. There were also several high-profile arrests of parents and relatives

accused of selling children for human sacrifice. In January this year the Ugandan government appointed a special police taskforce on human sacrifice and announced that 2,000 officers were to receive specialist training in tackling child trafficking with the support of the US government. Since the taskforce was set up there have been 15 more murders linked to human sacrifice with another 200 disappearances, mainly of children and young adults, under investigation.” (The Observer (UK) (6 September 2009) *Child sacrifice and ritual murders rise in Uganda as famine looms*)

A document published by the *Institute for War & Peace Reporting* states:

“The Ugandan parliament is in the process of drafting a law that will make the ritualistic sacrifice of children, which is not specifically defined in local law, a capital offence. It comes amid concerns that some of the growing numbers of abducted children in the north of the country may have been killed in this way. Local authorities say that child abduction is becoming an increasing concern for parents in northern Uganda who are trying to rebuild their villages following two decades of devastating war and conflict. According to the inspector general of police, Kale Kaiyura, there were 318 reported cases of child abduction in Uganda in 2008, up from 230 in 2006.” (Institute for War & Peace Reporting (17 July 2009) *Child Sacrifice Scourge Alarms North*)

This document also states:

“According to James Ongom, a police investigating officer, 40 children have died as a result of ritual killings this year alone. Out of these cases, 15 have so far been investigated, but not one has resulted in legal proceedings, according to Ongom. Raymond Otim, Lira district police chief, says that almost all cases of child sacrifice have revolved around witchcraft. Despite the growing problem of child sacrifice in the north, law enforcers complain that it is very difficult to catch and punish offenders.” (ibid)

An article from *The Independent* states:

“Similarly gruesome stories of people, especially children, being killed by parents, friends, and strangers in horrific ritual practices have become common in the news in the last four months. Recent police reports put a staggering figure of 100 children missing in Uganda in November 2008 alone. Many are feared murdered. Eighty of the cases were reported in Kampala alone. “We are yet to find out the reason behind the missing children,” says Fred Enanga, police CID spokesman, “but ritualistic killing of children is murder, and anyone involved in this act will face murder charges.” Enanga says that while children may go missing for a number of reasons – human trafficking, family break-ups, child torture by stepmothers, child labour – police suspect that ritualistic child sacrifice tops the list.” (The Independent (25 February 2009) *Uganda’s epidemic of child sacrifice*)

In a section headed “What drives the killings?” this article states:

“But some analysts believe that more often, poverty, weak legislation and negligent parenting are to blame for the rise in child sacrifice in Uganda.” (ibid)

In this section it is also noted that:

“Dr Nsaba Buturo, the minister for ethics and integrity, blames the murders on witchcraft. He says the ‘witchdoctors’ prey on people’s fear and greed for riches.” (ibid)

A *BBC News* report states:

“The Ugandan government told us that human sacrifice is on the increase, and according to the head of the country's Anti-Human Sacrifice Taskforce the crime is directly linked to rising levels of development and prosperity, and an increasing belief that witchcraft can help people get rich quickly.” (BBC News (7 January 2010) *Battling Uganda's witch-doctors*)

In a section headed “Extortion” this report states:

“The witch-doctor denied any direct involvement in murder or incitement to murder, saying his spirits spoke directly to his clients. He told us he was paid 500,000 Ugandan shillings (£160 or \$260) for a consultation, but that most of that money was handed over to his ‘boss’ in a nationwide network of witch-doctors. Head of the Anti-Human Sacrifice and Trafficking Task Force, assistant commissioner Moses Binoga of the Ugandan police, said he knew of the boss referred to - involved in one of five or six witch-doctor protection rackets operating in the country. ‘The senior ones extort money from lower people because they deal in illegal things,’ he told us. Mr Binoga said police had opened 26 murder cases in 2009, in which the victim appeared to have been ritually sacrificed, compared with just three cases in 2007. ‘We also have about 120 children and adults reported missing whose fate we have not traced. We cannot rule out that they may be victims of human sacrifice,’ he said. But child protection campaigners believe the real number is much higher, as some disappearances are not reported to police.” (ibid)

An article from the Ugandan newspaper *The Monitor* refers to murders and disappearances in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions as follows:

“The spate of murders and rising number of children disappearing, however, is generating panic across Acholi and Lango sub-regions. In the last three months, over 40 children have either gone missing or have been killed, according to Ms Eunice Apio, the executive director of Facilitation for Peace and Development, an NGO based in Gulu. Cases of child theft have also been reported in hospitals, nursery schools and other child-care centres in Gulu, prompting calls for increased security and tougher laws. In line with this call, Chief Justice Benjamin Odoki recently urged the courts to pass tougher sentences for those involved in child abuse offenses. In the meantime, parents in the north have taken to circumcising their children and adorning them with earrings to deter would be ritual murders.” (The Monitor (9 September 2009) *Uganda: Child Sacrifice Wave Hits northern Region*)

An article published online by the Ugandan newspaper *New Vision* states:

“The acting Police commander, Charles Opira, said the killers cut off Rwija's private parts and chopped off his tongue. He classified the incident as a ritual murder. ‘Rwija's private parts and tongue were missing. We suspect he was sacrificed,’ Opiro told *The New Vision*. ‘There are a lot of witchdoctors in Kasusu where the murder took place. We are going to scrutinise all the witch doctors operating in the area to identify those who are not licensed.’” (*New Vision* (30 November 2009) *Uganda: Suspected Ritual Murder Case in Fort Portal*)

A *BBC News* report on the arrest of witchdoctors suspected of involvement in ritual murders states:

“Police in Uganda have arrested seven suspected witchdoctors after the headless body of a woman was found in a bush in the capital Kampala. A police spokeswoman told the *BBC* that shrines and fetishes had been destroyed in the operation. The spokeswoman said a special unit had been set up to deal with ritual murders and dissuade both traditional healers and the public from the practice. Some people believe potions made from human body parts will bring them luck.” (*BBC News* (10 February 2009) *Arrests for Ugandan ritual murder*)

A *New Vision* article states:

“The beheaded body of woman abducted from Bweyogerere was yesterday retrieved from a swamp in Bwaise, a Kampala city suburb. The Police arrested 10 witchdoctors suspected to have been involved in the ritual sacrifice during a daylong operation. Scores of shrines were destroyed and fetishes set ablaze.” (*New Vision* (9 February 2009) *Uganda: Witchdoctors Held Over Ritual Murder*)

A *New Vision* article on the imprisonment of a witchdoctor states:

“The High Court has sentenced a witch doctor to 16 years imprisonment after finding him guilty of kidnapping a child for purposes of ritual sacrifice. ‘Kidnapping children with intent to sacrificing them in ritual practice has reached an alarming situation in Uganda and it should not be tolerated,’ the trial judge said when sentencing Sennoga Ssentumbwe on Thursday.” (*New Vision* (17 April 2009) *Uganda: Witchdoctor Jailed for 16 Years*)

A *New Vision* article on the arrest of suspected ritualists in July 2009 states:

“The police in Jinja have arrested seven people, including three witchdoctors, who are said to have connived and beheaded a six-year-old boy at Nakibizi, Mukono district. The seven suspects were arrested after the Police and the Rapid Response Unit (RRU) carried out an operation following the murder of the boy. Moses Kimbowa, Muzamiru Mukalazi and Anthony Ssendikadiwa Mulangira, all witchdoctors and residents of Namwezi village, were arrested on Monday evening. The boy was beheaded a week ago and his body found in a cassava plantation near his grandmother's home in Njeru Town Council. Zurah Ganyana, the Police spokesperson for the south-eastern region, said the Police also arrested Masitulah Nassali, James Muwanga, Marriam Mauliddi and Ivan Nyombi. Kimbowa was found with a human bone in his shrine when he was

picked from his house on Monday, according to the Police. The witchdoctor reportedly confessed that he had so far killed four people and buried them in the compound near his four shrines.” (New Vision (22 July 2009) *Uganda: Seven Arrested Over Ritual Murder of Six-Year-Old Boy*)

A January 2010 *New Vision* article states:

“The Mukono Magistrate's Court was on Friday stunned when a seven-year-old boy testified against two suspects who allegedly hacked him with a pang in a suspected ritual attack. The victim, who is still nursing an injury on the skull, told the court that two men he knew waylaid him while he had gone to pick jackfruit from the garden and hacked him several times before they reportedly collected the blood oozing from his head. He was testifying in the case in which two witchdoctors are accused of attempting to murder him.” (New Vision (10 January 2010) *Uganda: 7-Year-Old Pins Ritual Murder Suspects*)

A *New Vision* editorial comments on recent events as follows:

“A 36-year old man from Mpigi had his private parts cut off and his eyeball removed in a case of suspected ritual murder last weekend. At about the same time, a 10-year-old girl from the neighbouring Wakiso district was found murdered and her leg and arm cut off in another suspected case of witchcraft. Cases like these are not mentioned in the Police's weekly briefings. When asked about them, the Police say they are still investigating. It is disturbing that such horrific crimes can take place in our midst and the public is left in the dark about what is happening. Officially, 29 cases of human sacrifice were reported by the Police last year. Although this is an increase to previous years, it is only a fraction of the number of children who went missing in 2009. Stories about human sacrifice generate huge anxiety among the population since nobody knows who will fall victim next. Parents want to know if it is safe to send their children to buy milk in the shop around the corner, or let them walk to school alone. The silence of the Police adds to the mystery surrounding many of these cases, and the feeling of insecurity.” (New Vision (29 January 2010) *Uganda: Police Should Clarify On Ritual Murder Cases*)

A *New Vision* article on the government response to ritual killings states:

“The Government has set up a judicial commission of inquiry to investigate the increasing number of suspected ritual murder cases. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Kirunda Kivejinja, informed Parliament yesterday that the commission would be headed by retired Supreme Court judge Joseph Mulenga. The announcement came after MPs complained about daily media reports of mysterious murders involving cutting of limbs. The Police said in a report recently that the number of people killed in cases of human sacrifice increased to 29 in 2009, from three in 2007. In addition, 123 people were missing by the end of 2009; most of them are suspected to have become victims of human sacrifice. The majority are children.” (New Vision (2 February 2010) *Uganda: Judicial Commission to Probe Ritual Murders*)

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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