



BRANDED FOR LIFE

HOW WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS LEAD TO HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS OF HUNDREDS OF WOMEN IN NORTH GHANA

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GLOSSARY

ACHPR	The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CHRAJ	Ghana Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice
DOVSU	The Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit
ICCPR	The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
SOOTHSAYER	Someone believed to be able to predict the future
TRADITIONAL CAMPS	Camps where people accused of witchcraft go and that are overseen by a traditional priest
TRADITIONAL PRIEST	Spiritual leader practicing traditional animist faith, including rituals and animal sacrifices
WITCH DOCTOR	Someone in the community believed to have the power to determine whether someone has the power of witchcraft

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Witchcraft is a system of beliefs that exist in various communities in the world, including in Ghana where people accused of witchcraft end up in camps in the North East and Northern regions. It is important to distinguish harmful practices and human rights violations related to witchcraft accusations and the legitimate exercise of religious freedom, which is protected under international law.

ACCUSATIONS OF WITCHCRAFT IN NORTH GHANA

Amnesty International conducted research on the issue, while a bill criminalizing witchcraft-related attacks was passed in parliament in July 2023 but not signed into law. The organization visited four camps during two research trips and interviewed: 93 people accused of witchcraft, the family of a woman killed following an accusation, four people overseeing the camps, 12 national and international organizations working on the issue, a Ghanaian professor in development studies, and 22 government officials including local authorities.

The lack of economic resources in those regions compared to the rest of the country contributes to tensions within the communities and increases the risk that already marginalized individuals, particularly older women, are accused of practicing witchcraft. Such accusations often arise from tragic events, such as an illness or death, but can also be triggered by community members who experience vivid dreams or are simply envious. Those accused of witchcraft generally face intersecting forms of discrimination and are unable to defend themselves as they typically possess one or more characteristics that put them at greater risk within the community. These characteristics may include being older, being a woman, living in poverty, having limited formal education, suffering from health conditions, or having a disability. Women who are unmarried, successful, or otherwise do not conform to stereotypical gender roles are more likely to be targeted, as are widowed women who do not have an adult son. Accusations frequently start from family members and can lead to violence, including killings, leaving many accused individuals with no choice but to flee.

STATE FAILURE TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE ACCUSED OF WITCHCRAFT

The right to life and security of the person includes the duty of the state to put in place a legal framework to protect individuals from foreseeable threats by other people, especially for individuals in vulnerable conditions. In Ghana, incidents of violence against individuals accused of witchcraft are rarely reported to the police, and when they are, they are not systematically investigated. This lack of reporting is partly due to a lack of understanding among affected people regarding their rights, as well as the fear of going to the police. One woman who was accused told Amnesty International: “if I had reported it to the police, the accusers would have finished with me. I didn’t report it because the pressure on me was too high.” The absence of specific laws addressing witchcraft-related attacks, combined with a lack of a national, comprehensive campaign targeting impacted regions, infringes upon the rights to life and security of those accused and those at risk of being accused. The state also failed to provide safe shelters for those who have to flee their towns. As a result, they end up in camps run by traditional priests, where they remain until they die or a family member or another community accept them.

Access to food, safe housing and clean water is limited in the camps. Those accused usually farm in other people’s farms or otherwise rely on donations. The government provides a cash transfer programme, but not everyone in the camps is registered for it. Moreover, for those who receive financial assistance, it is not always paid on time and the amount is insufficient to provide an adequate standard of living in the camps. One resident of a camp told the organization: “since morning I don’t have anything to eat; my stomach is empty. In the afternoon and evening, I try to find something to eat... I feel embarrassed when I have to go to the chief and ask for food.” The floor of the huts in the camps are often in poor conditions, and the roofs do not effectively prevent rain from entering the huts. Those accused and living there, particularly vulnerable

and unable to provide adequate shelter for themselves, rely on the government to meet their basic needs. However, the government has failed in its responsibilities. Access to water is another significant challenge, as piped water is inaccessible in the camp despite a national policy aimed at ensuring access for everyone. As a result, women in the camps must often walk for hours through mountainous areas to fetch water from the nearby river. The Ghanaian authorities have failed to ensure sufficient and continuous availability and access to clean water for camp residents, who live in remote areas and are particularly vulnerable due to their age and economic situation.

Given the living conditions in the camps, residents are particularly at risk of getting sick. Most people in the camps interviewed by Amnesty International have national health insurance but must pay out of pocket for medications that are not covered under the insurance, which they can rarely afford to. As one woman who lives in a camp explained: “my waist is hurting. I cannot stand up... I have some rashes on my body. I have high blood pressure. There are doctors, but when I go there and he writes me a prescription, I cannot buy it; so, I take the prescription and leave it at home.” Mental health is also a concern in the camps; one woman told Amnesty International that she even contemplated suicide: “When I came here, I was thinking of committing suicide... because the accusation was too much. It was so painful to me. They were saying that I was responsible for the death of the son I loved so much.”

The state holds the primary responsibility for ensuring the right to health is fulfilled, although civil society organizations can play a supportive role. Based on the information Amnesty International was able to gather, the state has failed to provide adequate access to healthcare to people in the camps who are particularly vulnerable. As a result, these individuals often depend on the assistance of NGOs or individuals, which can sometimes be insufficient to guarantee their access to quality healthcare.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Amongst other recommendations, Amnesty International recommends that the government implement a long-term, coordinated national awareness campaign to challenge cultural and social practices that discriminate against women and older people, including witchcraft accusations. The government must allocate sufficient resources for this effort. Additionally, legislation should be passed to criminalize witchcraft accusations and related abuses. The state must ensure that the police department is adequately resourced to respond to incidents and that there are enough police stations near areas where witchcraft accusations are predominant. While people remain in the camps, the government should ensure access to livelihoods, adequate food, clean water and adequate housing for all people affected without any form of discrimination. This can be partly achieved by providing regular financial assistance to all residents in the camps.

2. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 SCOPE

Witchcraft accusations have been occurring for centuries in the north of Ghana. This report looks at the impact of witchcraft accusations in the Northern and North East regions where the camps people accused of witchcraft go are located. Although Amnesty International visited all four traditional camps,¹ the field research focused mainly on the Kukuo (Northern region) and Gambaga (North East region) camps. Nevertheless, some examples are drawn from the other two camps. The report focuses predominantly on women because they are more likely to be accused of witchcraft. However, 11 men accused of witchcraft were also interviewed. This report focuses on the Ghanaian government's actions and policies since 2020 to address the treatment of people who have been subjected to witchcraft accusations and forced to live in camps. Amnesty International decided to focus on this period because on 23 July 2020, a 90-year-old woman was lynched to death in Kafaba (in the Savannah Region) after being accused of being a witch. Part of the lynching was caught on camera and circulated online, creating outrage nationwide. Shortly thereafter, the Coalition Against Witchcraft Accusations, a coalition of Ghanaian non-governmental organizations including Amnesty International Ghana, was created to push for a change.

This report first investigates the preventive and remedial measures put in place by the government to protect the right to life and security of people accused of witchcraft, then investigates the living conditions in the camps.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

This report is based on Amnesty International's desk and field research conducted between July 2023 and January 2025. During this time, researchers carried out two trips to Ghana from 26 November to 9 December 2023 and from 21 April to 8 May 2024. One of the objectives of the research trip in 2023 was to gather general information about domestic violence and witchcraft accusations and the structures put in place to respond to it across Ghana. During that research trip, a delegation composed of three Amnesty International staff visited Accra and the camps in Kpatinga and Gnani. The delegation was accompanied in the camps by a staff from Songtaba, a Ghanaian non-governmental organization that facilitated access to the camps. The second research trip aimed at deepening the research on witchcraft accusations and their impact on the lives of those accused. Five staff of Amnesty International and a staff from Songtaba went to Accra and to the camps in Gambaga, Kukuo and Gnani.

Amnesty International interviewed in total 93 people accused of witchcraft: 33 in Kukuo, 31 in Gambaga, three in Kpatinga, 22 in Gnani and four who were reintegrated in other communities. Of those 93 people, 62 were interviewed individually and 31 were interviewed through focus groups. Four focus groups were conducted, one in Gambaga of 10 women, two in Kukuo of five and six women and one in Gnani of 10 men. Given that the issue of witchcraft accusations predominantly affects women, Amnesty International

¹ In addition to the four "traditional camps" overseen by traditional priests, there is another camp in Gushegu, Northern Ghana, overseen by the catholic church.

interviewed more women: 82 women and 11 men. The organization also interviewed a Kukuo assemblyman as well as four people overseeing the camps including three traditional priests in Gnani, Gambaga and Kukuo respectively, and one camp manager in Gambaga. Amnesty International also conducted an interview in Katiejeli in the Northern region of the family of a woman who was lynched.

Most people interviewed in the four camps did not know their exact age. However, based on their stories and their family situation, Amnesty International could determine that most interviewees were between 50 and 90 years old. Amnesty International prefers a context specific approach to older age, which takes into account the ways in which people are identified and self-identify in a given context, consistent with the approach taken by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).² For this reason, the cases of people referred as “older” in the report are cases of people who are between 50 and 90 years old and spoke about their experiences as older people.

Most interviewees in the camps were approached for an interview directly on site, while some were referred to Amnesty International by a partner organization. Some interviews were conducted in English, but most interviews were conducted in local languages including Konkomba, Dagbani, Frafra, Mampruli and Bimoba. Amnesty International relied on interpreters for the interviews that were not conducted in English. Some names and identifying details of individuals whose cases are featured in this report have been withheld to protect their security. In those cases, pseudonyms were used. Photos and videos of the camps were taken during the research trips as evidence of the living conditions in the camps.

In addition, Amnesty International’s research was informed by its review and analysis of relevant national and international legal documents, official government websites, governmental policies and plans, NGOs reports and United Nations bodies and media articles.

Twelve national and international organizations, including the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), a Ghanaian professor in development studies and two foreign embassies were consulted in person about their work on gender-based violence in Ghana or over the phone before and after the research trips. Amnesty International was able to speak with 22 officials from the following authorities: the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Health, a district police station, East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, Nanumba South District Assembly and the Department of Social Welfare in the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (Ministry of Gender). Despite sending meeting requests, Amnesty International was not able to secure meetings with the Department of Gender in the Ministry of Gender, the northern regional office of the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the Northern Regional Health Directorate. Requests for information were sent electronically and hand-delivered on 11 November 2024 to the following authorities: the Minister of Gender, the National Health Insurance Authority, the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands, the Ministry of Justice, Ghana Police Service and the Department of Gender of the Northern Regional Coordinating Council. Requests for information were also sent electronically on 7 November 2024 to Nanumba South District Assembly and East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly as a follow-up to previous meetings regarding Kukuo and Gambaga camps respectively. Moreover, requests for information were sent to Yendi Municipal Assembly and Gushegu Municipal Assembly by mail and electronically on 20 January 2025 regarding social services in Gnani and Kpatinga camps respectively. Gushegu Municipal Assembly responded to the request on 28 January 2025, and their response was integrated into the report. By the time of publication, Amnesty International had not received an answer to the other requests.

As Amnesty International was able to meet with the local governments overseeing Kukuo and Gambaga camps and was able to conduct more interviews in those camps, this report focuses mainly on governmental initiatives in Kukuo and Gambaga camps.

Amnesty International hand-delivered and sent electronically letters summarizing the main findings of the research on 26 February 2025 to the following authorities: the Minister of Gender, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, the Minister of Health and the Inspector General of Police. Amnesty International did not receive any replies.

Amnesty International would like to express our utmost gratitude to all the people directly affected by the situation in Northern and North East Ghana and who were willing to speak with Amnesty International and share their experience. Amnesty International is also grateful to all the people who took the time to meet its staff and share their insights into witchcraft accusations. The organization would like to thank the authorities who agreed to meet with us, as well as the organizations that agreed to share their knowledge with us, particularly Songtaba, Action Aid Ghana and The Sanneh Institute.

² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2012 ECOSOC Report), UN Doc. E/2012/51, 20 April 2012, para. 8, <https://undocs.org/E/2012/51>.

3. SOCIAL CONTEXT

3.1 ROOTS OF ACCUSATIONS

“Traditional cosmologies around the world are underpinned by the belief in good and evil. This is the basis of the belief in witchcraft which is considered to be a force which can help those who possess it and harm others. As long as people believe in good and evil, there will be witchcraft accusations as the explanation for all kind of misfortunes and good fortune. [The belief] is not a problem in itself; it is the ways in which it is used to attack people with particular profiles that is problematic.”³

Dzodzi Tsikata, professor of development studies

Witchcraft is a system of beliefs that exist in various communities in the world. Although the belief in witchcraft itself is protected under the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, abuses as a result of that belief are not.⁴ Human rights violations and abuses linked to witchcraft accusations occur all over the world under various forms; according to the United Nations, those attacks have increased over time, including during the coronavirus pandemic.⁵ The belief in witchcraft is entrenched in the Northern and North East regions of Ghana, especially within the Konkomba, Dagomba, Mamprusi and Bimoba ethnic groups.⁶

Whether rooted in limited access to information, superstitious or spiritual beliefs, the accusations are usually initiated by a member of the community after a tragic event such as a death,⁷ miscarriage or an illness in the family or the community.⁸ However, even financial misfortune or dreams can suffice to uproot the person

³ Interview by voice call with Dzodzi Tsikata, professor of development studies, 28 January 2025.

⁴ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 18.

⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization, Report, 1 February 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/52/47, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5247-study-situation-violations-and-abuses-human-rights-rooted>, para. 4.

⁶ The Sanneh Institute, “Report on Alleged Witches’ Camps in Ghana”, June 2021, <https://tsinet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/REPORT-ON-WITCH-CAMPS-4.pdf>, p. 2.

⁷ In some communities, it is common to go to a soothsayer after a death to try to decipher the person responsible for it as they believe someone else is always behind a person’s death.

⁸ The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and Crossroads International, “Baseline Study Report on Access to Justice and Gender Based Violence Against Elderly Women Alleged As Witches in Ghana”, March 2022, <https://chraj.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Baseline-Study-Report-Access-to-Justice-Project.pdf>, p. 14.

accused. While accusations may arise from a legitimate fear and belief, some people hide behind the belief to accuse others out of jealousy, because they covet their success or lands, owe them money, or consider them a financial burden within the family. As such, poverty may play a role in triggering accusations; the lack of resources causes tensions and triggers accusations against the most vulnerable within the community. One researcher attributed the prevalence of witchcraft accusations in the north of Ghana to a lack of development investment in the region: “social tension underlying witchcraft accusations can be linked to unequal incorporation of villages and regions into capitalist market systems [...] This is important to consider in asking why the camps are located in northern Ghana, which is a region historically deprived of development investment and yet used to support a southern based economy through colonial and postcolonial government policies.”⁹ While the impacted regions lack investments, another expert noted that with the advance of capitalism as a model, “traditional communal values” are being replaced by a quest for wealth.¹⁰ In other words, members of communities are now willing to forgo solidarity to try to gain more properties and wealth, including accusing widows of being witches to push them out of their lands and take possession of it.¹¹

Accusations often start within the family, although they can also come from someone in the community, witch doctors, priests or self-proclaimed prophets.¹² Men are often the primary accusers and perpetrators of subsequent gender-based violence against women.¹³ Accusations can escalate into severe abuses or attacks, including beatings, stoning, burning, or poisoning, which can result in death.¹⁴ Survivors are often banished from the community. The Ghanaian government does not publish statistics regarding either the prevalence of attacks perpetrated in the context of witchcraft accusations or how many of them lead to deaths. Amnesty International requested that information to the Ministry of Justice but did not get an answer.

⁹ Alexandra Crampton, “No Peace in the House”, January 2013, *Anthropology & Aging Quarterly*, Volume 34, Issue 2, p.201-202; also see ActionAid, “Condemned without trial: women and witchcraft in Ghana”, 2012, <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/condemned-without-trial-women-and-witchcraft-in-ghana>, p. 7.

¹⁰ Sara Pierre, “Human Rights Violations and Accusations of Witchcraft in Ghana”, Fall 2018, International Human Rights Internship Program Working Paper Series, Volume 6, Issue 1, p. 19.

¹¹ Sara Pierre, “Human Rights Violations and Accusations of Witchcraft in Ghana” (previously cited), p.19.

¹² CHRAJ and Crossroads international, “Baseline Study Report on Access to Justice and Gender Based Violence Against Elderly Women Alleged As Witches in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 15.

¹³ Focus group in person with five women, residents of Kukuuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuuo camp; CHRAJ and Crossroads international, “Baseline Study Report on Access to Justice and Gender Based Violence Against Elderly Women Alleged As Witches in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 15.

¹⁴ CHRAJ and Crossroads international, “Baseline Study Report on Access to Justice and Gender Based Violence Against Elderly Women Alleged As Witches in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 15; OHCHR, *Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization* (previously cited), para. 18.

WHAT TRIGGERED THE WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS ACCORDING TO THE WOMEN WHO WERE ACCUSED

Dreams

"My neighbour said he dreamt about three people, but he could only see my face, and that I was trying to kill him. He doesn't want me [in the village], that's why he accused me."¹⁵ "Fawza"

"I was accused by my husband's brother's son. When he is sleeping, he says he sees my face and I am chasing him in the dream."¹⁶ "Ana"

"One day my auntie's granddaughter said that she had seen me in her dreams being a witch."¹⁷ Wuni Kolgu

Tragic events or misfortunes

"My brother's daughter got sick, and my brother accused me of that... My own brother accused me of something I have never experienced."¹⁸ "Sabrina"

"[My husband's brother] sent his son to a funeral and when he was coming back from the funeral, he had an accident on his motorcycle. [He] accused me of causing the accident."¹⁹ "Aissatou"

"[My brother] told me that... the spiritual guide told him that I killed his son and that now I would need to leave the house, or he would do something to me... I think that it was a plan with the elders and the chief from my community to accuse me. They were all men, and I was the only woman. It was my own brother who accused me, so everybody supported him. Nobody was there to support me."²⁰ Arrshetu Abdoulaye

Jealousy and resentment

"My younger brother went to a soothsayer, he came back and said [the soothsayer] said that I killed [our] brother... I was having problems with [him] because I was comfortable in my house with my two children. We were comfortable, we were eating well. He was jealous because he was struggling."²¹ "Corinne"

"My last born had accused me of bewitchment... [he] sold my property and asked me to remove my things from the home. He sold the house without my permission."²² "Tasha"

"With my efforts I managed to build five rooms building with bricks. This is when the jealousy started. One of my nieces... was accused of being a witch. I decided to host her in one of these rooms... My younger brother's son asked me: "why are you giving a room to a witch? You must be doing this because you are also a witch. In addition, I have also seen you in my dreams. You are a witch."²³ Lariba Koffi

"They always have plans of putting allegations against you especially if you are hardworking and are still strong and doing well as a woman... Some people borrow money from you and say they will pay you back then accuse you."²⁴ Adisa Mahama

"The chief was interested in my daughters; they were still going to school, and I refused for the chief to marry any of my daughters. One day, a child got sick in the community and the chief accused me... and that generated everything."²⁵ "Fatma"

¹⁵ Interview in person with "Fawza" (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gnani camp, 5 December 2023, Gnani camp.

¹⁶ Interview in person with "Ana" (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gambaga camp, 23 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

¹⁷ Interview in person with Wuni Kolgu, resident of Gambaga camp, 23 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

¹⁸ Interview in person with "Sabrina" (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gnani camp, 5 December 2023, Gnani camp.

¹⁹ Interview in person with "Aissatou" (name changed for security reasons), resident of Kpatinga camp, 4 December 2023, Kpatinga camp.

²⁰ Interview in person with Arrshetu Abdoulaye, resident of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

3.2 PROFILE OF THOSE ACCUSED

“With the threat of witchcraft accusation, women are afraid of growing old in their communities. They are even afraid of contributing to the community or providing their opinion. They know that they can be accused of challenging the norms.”²⁶

Representative of Songtaba

Those who fall victim to witchcraft accusations and the people making the accusations practice diverse faiths: Islam, Christianity or traditional faiths.²⁷ Family members, typically children or other close relatives of people accused of witchcraft, are also at risk of being accused of practising witchcraft and subjected to abuses,²⁸ as it was the case of two men Amnesty International spoke to who were accused of witchcraft subsequently to their mothers. While accusations of witchcraft can be grounded in real beliefs, the people accused often occupy marginalised positions within the community which makes them easy targets to scapegoat.²⁹

3.2.1 INTERSECTING VULNERABILITIES

In a report on witchcraft accusations worldwide, OHCHR noted that multiple factors combined can make an individual more vulnerable to an accusation: “[h]uman rights violations and abuses rooted in harmful practices related to accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks, as well as stigmatization, are predominantly committed against persons in vulnerable situations... Women are disproportionately affected, including older women, widows, women with disabilities and mothers of children with albinism. Multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, disability, religion and ethnicity are threat multipliers.”³⁰

People displaying more than one of characteristics outlined below are even more likely to be accused of practicing witchcraft. For instance, women who have a mental illness or who are older are significantly more likely to be accused than a young man. In the camps, Amnesty International interviewed older women who were accused after they became widowed and moved back to their parents’ or a brother’s house but could not contribute to the household income. On the other hand, older women were also accused if they were particularly active and successful. As one researcher noted: “elderly women who try to contribute to the local economy are branded as a witch, and those who do not are also branded as a witch.”³¹

3.2.2 OLDER PEOPLE

Under international law, there is no specific definition of older age. While chronological age – such as 50 or 60 – may often be used as a benchmark, this does not always reflect whether a person is exposed to risks

²¹ Interview in person with “Corinne” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gnani camp, 5 December 2023, Gnani camp.

²² Interview in person with “Tasha” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gambaga camp, 23 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²³ Interview in person with Lariba Koffi, resident of Gambaga camp, 23 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²⁴ Focus group in person with six women, residents of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²⁵ Interview in person with “Fatma” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Kukuo camp, 24 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²⁶ Interview in person with representatives of Songtaba and a representative of Action Aid Ghana, 4 December 2023, Tamale.

²⁷ CHRAJ and Crossroads international, “Baseline Study Report on Access to Justice and Gender Based Violence Against Elderly Women Alleged As Witches in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 27.

²⁸ CHRAJ and Crossroads international, “Baseline Study Report on Access to Justice and Gender Based Violence Against Elderly Women Alleged As Witches in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 27; OHCHR, Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization (previously cited), para. 16.

²⁹ CHRAJ and Crossroads international, “Baseline Study Report on Access to Justice and Gender Based Violence Against Elderly Women Alleged As Witches in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 27; 50.

³⁰ OHCHR, Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization (previously cited), para. 60.

³¹ Sara Pierre, “Human Rights Violations and Accusations of Witchcraft in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 18.

commonly associated with older age. Amnesty International uses a context-specific approach to older age. An anthropologist noted that ageism can trigger accusations in Ghana: “young resent the elderly because they live for a long time, whereas some young members of their families die prematurely”. This indicates a “reversal the natural order”.³² Other anthropologists theorize that in Ghana like in other African contexts, “these accusations can be analysed as interpersonal conflicts of jealousy and also as intergenerational power struggles when youth accuse elders of preventing success within families and communities.”³³ According to The Sanneh Institute, a Ghanaian organization that has been campaigning against witchcraft accusations and researching on the subject, most people accused of witchcraft are above 50 years old.³⁴ A Ghanaian professor in development studies explained when women are perceived as “older” in the impacted regions: “Menopause is one of the periods which marks a woman’s transition into a different stage of their lives... in agrarian societies where women accused of witchcraft usually come from, this age is also the age where women do not have the physical strength to do physical work like farming and supporting work that is demanding... it is around that time when a woman may become a widow; it brings with it a certain type of vulnerability.”³⁵

3.2.3 WOMEN

In Ghana, discrimination against women is prevalent despite pivotal laws aiming at fighting gender-based violence and discrimination such as the Domestic Violence Act 2007 (Act 732) and the Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Act 2024; the latter aims to increase women participation in public offices. According to data collected by the UN Women, there are 16.1% of women aged 20–24 years old who were married or in a union before they were 18 and as of February 2024, women held only 14.6% of seats in parliament.³⁶ Moreover, according to a 2022 report from the United Nations Population Fund about 28 per cent of women in Ghana reported enduring at least one type of domestic violence and 30 per cent of women experienced sexual violence at least once.³⁷

Women are more likely to be accused of witchcraft although men can be targets to a lesser extent. One scholar noted that “although both women and men may use witchcraft, the association between women and witchcraft is particularly negative in Ghana and other African contexts”.³⁸ The executive director of The Sanneh Institute confirmed that women are more likely to be accused of using witchcraft for ill purposes: “the issue of witchcraft accusations is mainly used by men to keep women there in the camps. It is purely gender-based. It is in majority women accused. It is men devising those superstitious theories to keep women in their place. Men can also get the spirit of witchcraft but in their case, it is seen as something positive, to do good things, while for women it is just to do bad things.”³⁹

Older women are disproportionately more likely to be victims of witchcraft accusations and ritual attacks.⁴⁰ Women who are older and depend on their families for support may be seen as a burden. However, in Ghana, activists have noticed that younger women are also increasingly at risk. One NGO worker explained: “we are getting pockets of younger women accused now; we had a case of a woman in her 40’s. More younger women are being accused of witchcraft. It is not just older women like before.”⁴¹

A woman is more likely to be accused if she is widowed, divorced, unmarried, childless, or is perceived as successful and independent or otherwise not fitting within patriarchal norms.⁴² In other words, women who do not fulfil their expected duty within the society to get married, stay married and have children are susceptible to witchcraft accusations. Even when they do get married, they may still be targeted if they become widows and only have girls and no adult male children as they do not benefit from the protection of an adult male.⁴³ Moreover, women deemed “too successful” within the community can become targets of

³² Sara Pierre, “Human Rights Violations and Accusations of Witchcraft in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 17.

³³ Alexandra Crampton, “No Peace in the House” (previously cited), p. 200.

³⁴ The Sanneh Institute, “Report on Alleged Witches’ Camps in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 2.

³⁵ Interview by voice call with Dzodzi Tsikata, professor of development studies, 28 January 2025.

³⁶ UN Women, Ghana, <https://data.unwomen.org/country/ghana> (accessed on 30 January 2025).

³⁷ Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services, United Nations Population Fund Country programme document for Ghana, Report, 12 July 2022, UN Doc. DP/FPA/CPD/GHA/8, para 4.

³⁸ Alexandra Crampton, “No Peace in the House” (previously cited), p. 200.

³⁹ Interview in person with professor John Azumah, Executive Director of The Sanneh Institute, 28 November 2023, Accra.

⁴⁰ OHCHR, Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization (previously cited), para. 15.

⁴¹ Interview in person with representatives of Songtaba and a representative of Action Aid Ghana, 4 December 2023, Tamale.

⁴² OHCHR, Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization (previously cited), para. 17.

⁴³ Interview in person with representatives of Songtaba and a representative of Action Aid Ghana, 4 December 2023, Tamale.

witchcraft accusations as it can trigger “attempts to restore a patriarchal order in the face of socioeconomic changes that had allowed women to make more gains and for men to lose resources.”⁴⁴

Often those targeted face multiple and intersecting forms of stigma and discrimination, due to physical appearances that transgress harmful socially constructed norms about feminine beauty and age, that are rooted in patriarchal and ageist views. For example, women are especially vulnerable to witchcraft accusations if they have yellowish or reddish eyes, are toothless, have a shrivelled stomach, or wrinkled facial skin or have bad posture or sagging breasts - physical traits which are wrongly viewed as “deformities” or “abnormalities” when, instead, they are natural signs of aging.⁴⁵

3.2.4 HEALTH CONDITIONS, DISABILITY

People, especially women, displaying signs of health issues, including mental health conditions are also easy targets for witchcraft accusations. Symptoms of mental health conditions such as dementia, schizophrenia and depression can trigger an accusation.⁴⁶ Women who are perceived to have an “eccentric” behaviour, such as speaking to themselves or who are perceived to be particularly inquisitive, are susceptible to be accused of practising witchcraft in Ghana.⁴⁷

3.2.5 POVERTY AND LACK OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION

People who end up in the camps and those making the accusations are generally living in underserved communities and lack access to education. In the rural parts of Ghana in the north of Ghana, more people are illiterate than the rest of the country; three-quarters of adults are illiterate compared to 43% at the national level.⁴⁸ Witchcraft accusations are more likely to occur where there is low socioeconomic status and a lack of formal education, as individuals in these situations may have less access to information and resources to challenge harmful beliefs.⁴⁹ By contrast individuals who live in urban areas and are formally educated are less likely to experience or attribute unexplained phenomena to witchcraft.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Alexandra Crampton, “No Peace in the House” (previously cited), p. 202.

⁴⁵ Sara Pierre, “Human Rights Violations and Accusations of Witchcraft in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 17.

⁴⁶ OHCHR, Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization (previously cited), para. 25; Sara Pierre, “Human Rights Violations and Accusations of Witchcraft in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 16.

⁴⁷ Sara Pierre, “Human Rights Violations and Accusations of Witchcraft in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 17.

⁴⁸ ActionAid, “Condemned without trial: women and witchcraft in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 7.

⁴⁹ Sara Pierre, “Human Rights Violations and Accusations of Witchcraft in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 18.

⁵⁰ Sara Pierre, “Human Rights Violations and Accusations of Witchcraft in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 18.

THE MEN ACCUSED

While the majority of people accused of witchcraft are women, some men are also accused and end up, most of the time, in Gnani camp, the biggest camp. Contrary to the women across all camps who have to leave behind their children⁵¹ and spouse, the men can bring their whole family with them when they are accused. However, not all of them chose to do so because of the living conditions in the camp. This is the case of Bidipume, who is a 60-years-old farmer who had spent a year in the camp when Amnesty International spoke to him; he explained: “[my family] remained because I can’t get a farm here to support them. They come to visit me.”⁵² The ones who chose to come with their families are concerned with being able to provide for all of them, like Badak, a farmer over 50 years old who had spent two decades in the camp: “when I think about [the accusation], it pains me, but I leave everything to God. It worries me because it ruined my life. My children were going to school, now I can’t take care of them. I have to struggle to pay for nursing school for my son.”⁵³ Nuwube, another farmer over 50 years old shares similar concerns: “I live with my family and sometimes depend on the chief for food. I feel I worry the chief with my demands.”⁵⁴

Like the women, they were often accused by someone from their family and for similar reasons: someone got sick, died, had a dream or was simply jealous due to their success. Some were accused because of their association with a woman who was accused before them. Nuwube was accused after he visited his mother in the camp despite being warned not to: “my mom was accused and came here. I was told not to come here to visit her, but I refused. Then, I was accused of witchcraft because they believed I used a dog for rituals.”⁵⁵ Badak was also accused after his mother was: “as I was there back home with my mother, a young woman got sick. I had to give her two units of blood, and after I did, she died. They accused my mother of witchcraft, and she left. Three years later, a person dreamt of me and said that I was trying to kill him; that person was not sick. They accused me then and said that my mother must have passed her powers to me.”⁵⁶

After an accusation, most people end up in so-called “witch camps” in the north of Ghana.

3.3 THE CAMPS

The camps in the north of Ghana are located on lands privately owned by traditional priests⁵⁷ where there is a shrine to perform rituals within a larger community. The camps were created informally as people came to the priests to perform rituals asking them to determine whether someone is a witch or a wizard. They have been in existence for more than a century, but it is unclear when they were first established.⁵⁸ There were originally six camps in the Northern and North East regions of Ghana. The Bonyase and Nabuli camps were closed down in 2014 and between 2019 and 2020, respectively, due to the efforts of civil society in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender. Subsequently, the former residents were reintegrated into other communities or were able to return to their own.⁵⁹ The remaining traditional camps are: Kpatinga, Gnani, Gambaga and Kukuo. Those camps do not have any walls or barriers delineating them, but the community members know where the boundaries lay. In addition to the traditional camps, there is also a shelter in Gushegu in the Northern Region run by a catholic church that Amnesty International did not visit or include in the research.

Upon arrival in any of the four traditional camps, an accused person has to go through a ritual involving chickens and alcohol to determine whether they have the power of witchcraft. During the ritual, the traditional priest kills a chicken (or a fowl) and depending on how the animal falls, the person is considered a witch or a wizard. If the animal falls on its back, the person is considered to possess witchcraft.⁶⁰ Then the person has to drink a concoction made by the priest meant to purify him or her. Even when the ritual

⁵¹ Some women are able to bring young children especially if they are breastfeeding.

⁵² Focus group in person with 10 men, Bidipume Gmajil, resident of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

⁵³ Interview in person with Badak Kwama, resident of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

⁵⁴ Focus group in person with 10 men, Nuwube Ndualip, resident of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

⁵⁵ Focus group in person with 10 men, Nuwube Ndualip, resident of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

⁵⁶ Interview in person with Badak Kwama, resident of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

⁵⁷ In the camp, the traditional priests are male leaders and are also called tindanas or tendanas; the lands where the camps sit are owned by tindanas or tendanas from one generation to another. They perform rituals to determine whether someone possesses witchcraft.

⁵⁸ Interview in person with the chief priest of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

⁵⁹ ActionAid Ghana, “Annual Report: People’s Power for Social Justice, 2019”, 2020, <https://ghana.actionaid.org/sites/ghana/files/publications/AAG%202019%20ANNUAL%20REPORT.pdf>, p. 27; Interview by video call with Action Aid Ghana, 2 August 2023.

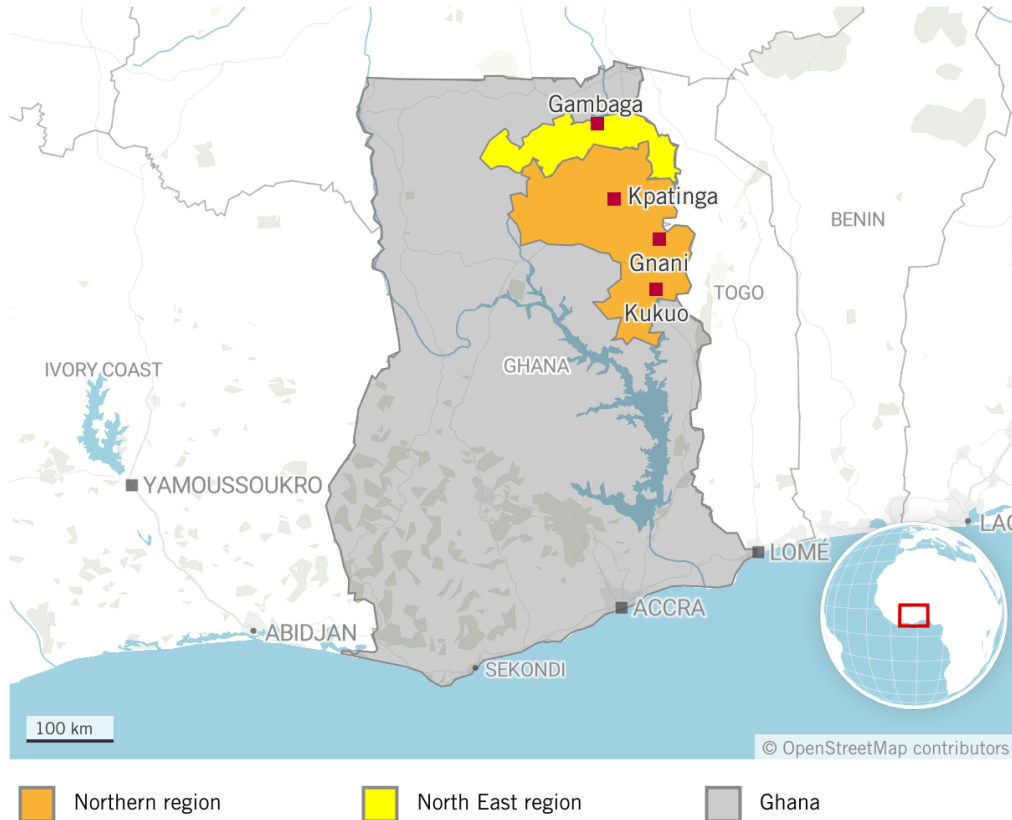
⁶⁰ Sara Pierre, “Human Rights Violations and Accusations of Witchcraft in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 14.

determines that a person accused is innocent, most decide to stay because they do not feel safe in their community anymore and/or because their families refuse to take them back.

In order to be allowed to leave the camp definitively, they have to go through another “purification” ritual. The person accused or someone from their family pays for the cost of the rituals.

There are also children in all the camps who are relatives of those accused.

Location of the camps



3.3.1 KPATINGA CAMP



 ↑ Kpatinga Camp, Northern Region © Amnesty International

Kpatinga camp is located in the Northern Region of Ghana in the district of Gushegu. It is the camp where there are the least number of people. When Amnesty International visited the camp in December 2023, there were only women who were accused of witchcraft there, with children who were usually their grandchildren; there were in total 15 women all above 50 years old (aged between 60 and 90 years old) and nine children (between 3 to 15 years old). When contacted by Amnesty International in January 2025, the local government stated that there were 14 women, 2 men and 10 children in the camp.⁶¹ According to the NGO The Sanneh Institute, in 2021, there were 27 adults in the camp, all women, which shows a decrease in the population there.⁶² All camp residents lived in small concrete structures with roofs made of aluminium. The rooms were built by an NGO, World Vision, over a decade ago. People coming to Kpatinga are mainly from the Dagomba ethnic group.⁶³ The camp is overseen by the traditional priest who owns the land and performs the rituals.

⁶¹ Social Welfare Officer at Gushegu Municipal Assembly, email to Amnesty International, 28 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

⁶² The Sanneh Institute, "Report on Alleged Witches' Camps in Ghana" (previously cited), p. 1.

⁶³ The Sanneh Institute, "Report on Alleged Witches' Camps in Ghana" (previously cited), p. 2.

3.3.2 GNANI CAMP



 ↑ Gnani camp, Northern Region. © Amnesty International

Gnani camp is the largest camp in Ghana and is located in the Northern region in Yendi district. It is the camp which hosts the majority of men accused of witchcraft. When Amnesty International visited the camp in May 2024, there were 229 adults in the camp, 141 women, 88 men and an undetermined number of children according to the chief priest.⁶⁴ According to the NGO The Sanneh Institute, in 2021, there were 196 adults in the camp, 38 men and 158 women.⁶⁵ This shows a significant rise in the size of the camp in the past few years. People accused in the camp were about 50 to 80 years old.⁶⁶ Each person had a mud hut with thatched roofs. People who come to the camp are from the surrounding communities but also come from further away. They are mainly from the Dagomba, Konkomba and Chekosi ethnic groups.⁶⁷

The traditional priest owns the land and performs the rituals. There are also camp coordinators who are members of the community and who help residents and visitors with relevant information.

⁶⁴ Interview in person with chief priest of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

⁶⁵ The Sanneh Institute, "Report on Alleged Witches' Camps in Ghana" (previously cited), p. 1.

⁶⁶ Interview in person with chief priest of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

⁶⁷ Interview in person with chief priest of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

3.3.3 GAMBAGA CAMP



 ↑ Gambaga Camp, North East Ghana. © Amnesty International

Gambaga camp is located in the North East region in the East Mamprusi district. Through a programme called Gambaga Outcast Home Project (also known as Go Home Project), the presbyterian church has been helping with the management of the camp since the 1960s, but the project officially started in 1994. According to the project coordinator, the camp has been functional since the 1900s.⁶⁸ When Amnesty International visited the camp in April 2024, there were 88 adults in total, 85 women and three men, as well as 33 children (including 10 boys and 18 girls currently in school) in the camp.⁶⁹ This represents a rise in the camp's population compared with The Sanneh Institute's estimates from 2021, when 78 adults lived in the camp, including one man and 77 women according to the NGO.⁷⁰

At the time of Amnesty International's visit, residents were aged between 40 and 85 years old, with the majority aged between 50 and 65. Some women arrived in the camp when they were younger, around 35 years old.⁷¹ There were 83 mud huts, each made up of one room and covered by a grass roof and 22 compounds, each holding three rooms made of cement. Allocation of living accommodations are based on availability upon arrival. The main ethnic groups in the camp are the Konkomba, Mamprusi, Bimoba and Dagomba, but there are also a few members of the Frafra and Kusasi communities within the camp.⁷²

⁶⁸ Interview in person with Gladys Lariba Mahama, Gambaga Outcast Home Project Coordinator, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

⁶⁹ Interview in person with Gladys Lariba Mahama, Gambaga Outcast Home Project Coordinator, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

⁷⁰ The Sanneh Institute, "Report on Alleged Witches' Camps in Ghana" (previously cited), p. 1.

⁷¹ Interview in person with Gladys Lariba Mahama, Gambaga Outcast Home Project Coordinator, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

⁷² Interview in person with Gladys Lariba Mahama, Gambaga Outcast Home Project Coordinator, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

3.3.4 KUKUO CAMP



  Kukuo Camp, Northern Ghana. © Amnesty International

Kukuo camp is located in the Northern region of Ghana in the Nanumba South district. When Amnesty International visited the camp in April 2024, there were only women accused of witchcraft who were on average 60 years old or older; no one was below 40 years old.⁷³ There were 178 women accused of witchcraft in Kukuo and an undetermined number of children. This represents a sharp rise in the camp's population compared with The Sanneh Institute's estimates from 2021, when 139 adults lived in the camp, including two men and 137 women, according to the NGO.⁷⁴ Contrary to other camps, after the initial ritual, the women accused do not have to go through another purification ritual when they decide to go back home.⁷⁵ Also, unlike other camps that are physically separated from the rest of the community where they are located, the women accused of witchcraft live amongst the rest of the community of Kukuo. The only apparent difference is the housing arrangement. The accused women live in small huts with thatched round roofs while the rest of the community live in stronger structures with square roofs. All women accused in the camp are from the Dagomba community.⁷⁶

The priest performs purification rituals on Mondays and Fridays; the women arriving in the camp do not interact with the rest of the community until they go through the ritual.⁷⁷ Camp coordinators who are part of the community assist the women and visitors with relevant information.

Despite the prevalence of witchcraft accusations and related abuses, the government has failed to prevent such accusations and protect the women disproportionately impacted by it.

⁷³ Interview in person with camp coordinators, 27 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

⁷⁴ The Sanneh Institute, "Report on Alleged Witches' Camps in Ghana" (previously cited), p. 1.

⁷⁵ Interview in person with the chief priest of Kukuo, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

⁷⁶ Interview in person with the chief priest of Kukuo, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

⁷⁷ Interview in person with camp coordinators, 27 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

CHILDREN IN THE CAMPS

Women leave alone when they are banished from their communities unless they have babies or small children. For women who are older, a child, usually a granddaughter of the accused is sent to the camp to help with daily tasks due to the advanced age of their grandmother. Amnesty International interviewed two girls, 16 and 17 years old, in Gambaga and Kukuo camps respectively. The former was sent to the camp to help her grandmother while the latter arrived in the camp with her mother who was accused of witchcraft. When accused, men usually go to the camp with their whole family, including their spouse and children. As a result, hundreds of people, mostly women and young girls end up in the camps far away from their communities. Children in the camps are allowed to go to the school in the nearby community, but in practice, some of them drop out of school to help their grandmothers in the camps. In Ghana, education is free in primary and secondary public schools.⁷⁸ However, parents pay for supplies, pens, writing notebooks, and sometimes uniforms.⁷⁹ A woman living in Kukuo camp explained: “my children don’t go to school [...]. When that happened to me, I had no one to take care of me so I had to take them out of school. They used to go in Bimbila. The first child completed junior high but there was no money for me to pay further education, so he stopped. The younger one left school when he was in early primary school for the same reason.”⁸⁰ A woman in another camp recounted a similar experience: “[my daughter] was going to school but because we stayed here, she dropped out [...] She said she would help since her father was no longer alive so she suggested herself to drop out instead because she knew I couldn’t afford the fees and everything else. She helps people in their farms, they give her the farms’ produce in exchange and that’s what we depend on.”⁸¹ In Gambaga camp, the presbyterian church runs a school, which in principle allows most children living there to pursue their education more easily. In Kpatinga, three out of 10 children are enrolled in primary school, but there are currently no high schools.⁸²

As a result, there are children in all the camps who are far away from their community and a paternal presence, which makes them, especially young girls, vulnerable. According to the Project Coordinator in Gambaga camp and The Sanneh Institute, the underage teenage daughter of a woman who was accused of witchcraft got pregnant by a middle-aged man from a nearby community. The Project Coordinator told Amnesty International that the man fled after the case was reported to CHRAJ.⁸³

Moreover, children in the camps are fully aware that they are primarily there to help their grandmothers. They know that they cannot leave the camp as long as their grandmothers are there and no one else is there to take care of them. When asked if she wanted to live somewhere else, a 16-year-old girl who has been in Gambaga camp since she was six years old responded: “If I go somewhere else and leave my grandmother, she cannot do anything.”⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Ministry of Education, “Free SHS Policy”, <https://moe.gov.gh/index.php/free-shs-policy/> (accessed on 22 January 2025).

⁷⁹ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi; Hon. Issah Abdul-Aziz, Kukuo assemblyman, whatsapp voice note to Amnesty International, 27 January 2025.

⁸⁰ Interview in person with Awabo Dala, resident of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

⁸¹ Interview in person with “Mariama” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Kpatinga camp, 4 December 2023, Kpatinga camp.

⁸² Social Welfare Officer at Gushegu Municipal Assembly, email to Amnesty International, 28 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

⁸³ Interview in person with Gladys Lariba Mahama, Gambaga Outcast Home Project Coordinator, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp; Interview in person with professor John Azumah, Executive Director of The Sanneh Institute, 28 November 2023, Accra.

⁸⁴ Interview in person with “Sophia” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gambaga camp, 23 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

4. STATE FAILURE TO PROTECT WOMEN'S RIGHT TO LIFE AND SECURITY

4.1 OBSTACLES TO ACCESS TO JUSTICE

“A failure by the state to address systematic patterns of violence through precautionary measures opens it up to violations of the right to life, as does the absence of accountability measures where such violence does occur ... States have a responsibility not only to investigate individual cases of such killings [witchcraft related], but also, where a pattern is discernible, to actively discourage them, potentially through heightened sentencing, together with community-level advocacy and awareness-raising.”⁸⁵

Agnes Callamard – former Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

⁸⁵ Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, “Statement by Agnes Callamard at the 71st session of the General Assembly”, 21 October 2016, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2016/10/statement-agnes-callamard-special-rapporteur-extrajudicial-summary-or-arbitrary>.

4.1.1 FEAR OF REPORTING AND LACK OF INVESTIGATIONS

The right to life and security of a person is not only violated when the person is arbitrarily deprived of their life, but it also includes the duty to protect life from “all reasonably foreseeable threats, including from threats emanating from private persons and entities.”⁸⁶ As such, all credible threats to a person’s life should be investigated.

In Ghana, there is a lack of official data on investigations into abuses linked with witchcraft accusations⁸⁷ and how often they result in prosecutions. Songtaba and Action Aid Ghana, two organizations actively working to end witchcraft accusations and providing support to the victims, recorded 19 cases of beatings linked to witchcraft accusations between 2020 and 2024 in the Northern, North East and Savannah regions, seven of which leading to deaths.⁸⁸ In the second half of 2023 alone, they recorded 15 physical attacks and five killings.⁸⁹ The organizations told Amnesty International that out of all those cases, they recorded only seven arrests in relation to two different cases, and only two convictions in relation to one case.⁹⁰

Moreover, witchcraft accusations are rarely reported to the police. Despite women being the most impacted by this phenomenon, most of them do not lodge complaints. A research project by CHRAJ in partnership with the NGO Crossroad International in 2022 found that 106 (63.9%) of the 166 women interviewed did not report the incident of violence following a witchcraft accusation to anyone; of the 60 women who reported the incident, the majority did so to the village chiefs or elders (76.7%), while only four women (6.7%) said they reported the incident to the police.⁹¹

Most women Amnesty International spoke to across the four camps did not file complaints with the authorities because they feared for their life, found it socially unacceptable, or never thought it could be an option. One woman in Gambaga camp told the organization: “if I had reported it to the police, the accusers would have finished with me. I didn’t report it because the pressure on me was too high.”⁹² In another documented case, Gari, a woman in her 50’s, arrived in Gnani camp around 2021 after she was accused of using witchcraft to cause the death of her co-spouse’s son by another of her co-spouse’s sons. When asked why she did not go to the police, she responded: “they were equally my children, so I didn’t want to do anything bad to them, then my husband would not be happy.”⁹³ In another example, Mariama, a woman in her 80’s who has been in Kukuo camp since around 1994 said: “I went to inform three opinion leaders; by then the police were meant for literate people.”⁹⁴ This sentiment of helplessness was echoed by another woman in her 70’s who has been in Gambaga camp for 25 years and who felt that the police would not have been able to help: “I didn’t report to the police, if my husband was the chief and he did nothing for me, what could they do for me?”⁹⁵

⁸⁶ UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General Comment 36: Article 6: Right to Life, 3 September 2019, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 18.

⁸⁷ UN Committee against Torture (CAT), Concluding Observations: Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 19 of the Convention, 15 June 2011, UN Doc. CAT/C/GHA/CO/1, para 23.

⁸⁸ Representative from Songtaba, email to Amnesty International and a representative of Action Aid Ghana, 17 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

⁸⁹ Interview in person with representatives of Songtaba and a representative of Action Aid Ghana, 4 December 2023, Tamale.

⁹⁰ Representative from Songtaba, email to Amnesty International and a representative of Action Aid Ghana, 17 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

⁹¹ CHRAJ and Crossroads international, “Baseline Study Report on Access to Justice and Gender Based Violence Against Elderly Women Alleged As Witches in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 67.

⁹² Interview in person with “Larissa” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gambaga camp, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

⁹³ Interview in person with Gari Nyigul, resident of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

⁹⁴ Interview in person with Mariama Wambie, resident of Kukuo camp, 27 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

⁹⁵ Interview in person with Zenaibu Bogie, resident of Gambaga camp, 23 April 2024, Gambaga camp.



THE STORY OF WUNI



 ↑ Photo of Wuni in Gambaga camp © Amnesty International

Wuni, a 65-year-old woman who had been living in Gambaga camp for about 11 years, is the only woman interviewed by Amnesty International who tried to report to the police the abuse that happened in her village near Nalerigu in the North East region. She said: “my village there was perfect, but I had to leave because I was about to be lynched. Before, I was living happily with my family and my community members... One day the granddaughter of my auntie said that she had seen me in her dreams being a witch... The brother of the accuser came home with the chain of a bicycle and beat me in my house... The chief advised me to come here [the camp], but I went home. During the following days, the brother of the accuser brutalized me... I reported the incident to the police, but they were reluctant to do anything. The aggressor beat my arm, my shoulder and my face until it was full of blood. There were some witnesses to this aggression; they also saw that I was crying. My daughter was also crying. Some people tried to help me. The same day they gave me the tetanus vaccine.”⁹⁶ She said that although she was making a good living as a petty trader, she had to leave to avoid being lynched.⁹⁷

While reporting on violations of human rights linked to witchcraft accusations, OHCHR noted: “in some countries, being labelled as a “witch” is tantamount to receiving a death sentence. The various forms of violence related to accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks are often committed with impunity, related to the victims’ fear of reprisal and the lack of a law enforcement response [...] Sometimes, belief in witchcraft is spread across all sections of society, affecting also police officers and judges. That reportedly results in an unwillingness to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators.”⁹⁸ A Ghanaian NGO working on the issue told Amnesty International that police officers also sometimes believe in witchcraft, which makes it harder for them to intervene: “this is a cultural belief that has been with us for such a long time. Even police officers that take the complaints of the women that have been accused believe in witchcraft. Even people put in place to protect them have strong beliefs in that.”⁹⁹

Nanumba South District is one of the districts in the Northern region where witchcraft accusations are prevalent. In an interview with Amnesty International in April 2024, the Nanumba South District Police Commander noted that women in particular do not think about lodging complaints due to patriarchal societal norms: “Women do not put complaints because of the way they [community members] threaten women. They have succeeded in suppressing women to the extent that they don't know what their rights are. The few who know, because of the fear they put on them, they can't come out. They go back to their parents rather than seeking authorities.”¹⁰⁰ He explained the difficulties his office faces with cases where the victims have fled and do not lodge a complaint: “Some voluntarily accepted to leave based on the threats or were forcibly removed from the community or severely beaten. We don't get involved in those cases because for most of them we will hear about it later. The victims don't come to the police at all because of the fear. If we don't get

⁹⁶ Interview in person with Wuni Kolgu, resident of Gambaga camp, 23 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

⁹⁷ Interview in person with Wuni Kolgu, resident of Gambaga camp, 23 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

⁹⁸ OHCHR, Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization (previously cited), para. 6.

⁹⁹ Interview in person with representatives of Songtaba and a representative of Action Aid Ghana, 4 December 2023, Tamale.

¹⁰⁰ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

someone complaining or [if] the victim [does not] come, we will not know where to start from and [we will not] know who is responsible. Our informants are the ones who give us the information. But sometimes, because they are also part of the community, they would let time pass before they draw our attention to the issue... Sometimes we hear about it three – four months afterwards. In addition, some of these cases happen in rainy season¹⁰¹ so we don't hear about them until the season is over."¹⁰²

The Nanumba South District Police Commander said that, in the four years he has been in office, his office handled seven cases of witchcraft accusations, and the furthest his department has been with a case was to oversee a concrete term of settlement between both parties before the case went to court.¹⁰³ Thus, the case was subsequently withdrawn. The other six cases were resolved amicably. He described various barriers to prosecutions, one being the large numbers of incidents of witchcraft accusations. In general, his department tries to resolve the issue through mediation: "We try to calm the situation down before we think on who to arrest and prosecute. We invite one or two opinion leaders within the family or community. There are times we have to go to the community because you invite them, and they don't want to come. We go and engage with them by sensitizing in the first place [...] When we get cooperation, we don't do anything further which would have a negative effect on the person we're trying to protect. We use this approach because we want communities to be peaceful. Prosecuting this large number is very difficult. There are too many cases. Going with force would be the last resort. We don't have the capacity to undertake that task and to prosecute all the cases."¹⁰⁴ Difficult access to remote areas where the violations occur as well as insufficient money for fuel are other issues he noted: "it is hard to reach. The distance it would take for security to reach them, by that time they arrive, they would have done what they wanted to with the person."¹⁰⁵

While women are disproportionately targeted with witchcraft accusations, none of the seven complaints were made by women. Six out of the seven cases involved complaints by men in relation to an accusation against them. Meanwhile, the last case involved a complaint made by children on behalf of both of their parents; their father, and subsequently their mother were accused of witchcraft.¹⁰⁶

There are only accused women in Kukuo camp, the camp under the Nanumba South district. According to the police commander, women who ended up in this camp do not lodge complaints because it is culturally unacceptable within their ethnic group: "it might be because the Nanumbas still hold the chiefs to high standards. They prefer going to the palace rather than going to the police. They see people who go to the police as betrayers. This is just my observation."¹⁰⁷

Although cultural barriers to reporting witchcraft accusations and related abuse are undoubtedly an issue, 33 women interviewed by Amnesty International in Kukuo camp cited additional reasons for not reporting their cases to the police. Similar to other camps, they included: fear of going to the police, a sense of disempowerment as a woman, patriarchal or societal norms, a lack of knowledge about the police work and the long distance to the nearest police station.¹⁰⁸

These testimonies indicate that the Ghanaian authorities have not established an educational, societal and economic environment conducive to incident reporting and criminal investigations into abuses linked to witchcraft accusations as well as a failure to provide sufficient resources and clear objectives to police officers to engage in the fight against witchcraft accusations. The absence of effective investigations and prosecutions contributes to the recurrence of accusations and related abuses that can lead to death.

The case of Akua Denteh

The extent of the problem came to the forefront when a video of the lynching of a 90-year-old woman circulated online triggering outrage nationwide. On 23 July 2020, Akua Denteh was accused of being a witch and lynched to death in front of a crowd of people in Kafaba, her hometown, in the East Gonja District in the Savannah Region. Although her case became a symbol of the gravity of the situation, she was not the only

¹⁰¹ Raining season in the north of Ghana is typically from May to September.

¹⁰² Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁰³ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁰⁴ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁰⁵ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁰⁶ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁰⁷ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁰⁸ Zina, a woman in Kukuo camp over 70 years old said: "by then the world was still black and I never knew the procedure. I don't know and I never knew the work of a policeman." (Interview in person with Zina Woumbi, resident of Kukuo camp, 27 April 2024, Kukuo camp). Awabo, a woman about 70 years old, felt it was not her place to report the incident to the police: "I didn't go to the police because everything was done with my brothers and they did not go." (Interview in person with Awabo Dana, resident of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp). Salifu, a woman over 60, expressed the distance as a major issue: "I didn't report to the police because the police station is very far. We don't have a police station in the community." (Interview in person with Salifu Zelia, resident of Kukuo camp, 27 April 2024, Kukuo camp). Azahara, a woman who is about 60 years old responded: "We are scared of the police. They would beat or detained me. We don't want to have anything to do with the police." (Interview in person with Azahara Yakubu, resident of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp).

one who lost her life due to witchcraft accusations; killings had happened before and continued to happen since that incident.

Seven individuals were initially arrested for the killing of Akua Denteh, but only two women who were showed beating Akua on the video were sentenced to 12 years in prison by Tamale High Court on 3 July 2023 for manslaughter.¹⁰⁹

THE LAST DAYS OF AKUA DENTEH



Photo of Akua Denteh's daughter, Zeinab Mahama. © Amnesty International

Akua started being persecuted a few days before her death. She was living with her daughter, Zeinab Mahama, who recounted the horror of her mother's last days: "I was very close to her because we lived together in our house in Kafaba... The day they came accusing her of being a witch and were asking to bring them her witchcraft, it was a Tuesday, but I don't remember the date. We were at home alone. It was about 3am and they were banging on the door. I opened it. It was dark but I could see that almost the whole community was there. There were around 90 people. This time it was just men. I was scared when I saw so many people."¹¹⁰ A witch doctor was invited by the youth in the community because they believed she was a witch. The witch doctor had searched the room but did not find anything.¹¹¹ Zeinab and her mother could not sleep the rest of the night because of the fear.¹¹²

The next day, Akua's son Mahama Salami came to Kafaba from out of town and spoke to the chief who said he would talk to community members to avoid any issue, then Mahama returned home.¹¹³ Zeinab and her mother still felt uneasy because of the incident but decided to trust in the chief's words. The same day the crowd came back. Zeinab described what happened: "I was cooking and preparing the food with my mother. It was around 12pm. All of a sudden a lot of people got into the house. There were many people, men, children, women... They entered the house and beat my mother. Some with a cane, other people were beating her with wire. They beat her while she was inside the house... She was just sitting on the patio while she was being beaten. She was shouting while they beat her. I wanted to defend her, but they threatened to beat me too if I intervened."¹¹⁴ They beat Akua for about an hour, telling her to reveal her witchcraft. Akua did not understand why she was being accused as she never had any issues in the community before.¹¹⁵

The following day, 23 July 2020, was the day Akua was killed. Zeinab recounted the events: "a member of the community came and picked her up from our house to take her to the patio of another neighbour, just across the road. I didn't follow them... They took her after breakfast and brought her back around 12:00pm. They had her for around five hours. This time there was blood on her injuries. She was complaining of pain in her knees. They just dumped her at the door. We called my brother. We put my mum in her room. When my brother came, he went to the room and my mum told him: "Take those two fowls for your wife." These were the last words she said. Then she died. Isak my nephew was the one that

¹⁰⁹ Joy Online, "Murderers of Akua Denteh sentenced to 12 years imprisonment", 5 July 2023, <https://www.myjoyonline.com/murderers-of-akua-denteh-sentenced-to-12-years-imprisonment/>.

¹¹⁰ Interview in person with Zeinab Mahama, daughter of victim, 29 April 2024, Katiejeli.

¹¹¹ Interview in person with Mahama Salami, son of victim, 29 April 2024, Katiejeli.

¹¹² Interview in person with Zeinab Mahama, daughter of victim, 29 April 2024, Katiejeli.

¹¹³ Interview in person with Mahama Salami, son of victim, 29 April 2024, Katiejeli.

¹¹⁴ Interview in person with Zeinab Mahama, daughter of victim, 29 April 2024, Katiejeli.

¹¹⁵ Interview in person with Zeinab Mahama, daughter of victim, 29 April 2024, Katiejeli.

realized that she was dead. He entered the room and said: “grandma, I’m here, I’m here.” She didn’t react. He put his face on her chest and then he said: “grandma is no more.”¹¹⁶

Mahama, her son, recalled how he felt at the time: “I watched the video. I can’t explain how it made me feel. If I try to explain, I would shed tears. I recognized some people in the video, they are part of the youth staying there... My mother was a good, caring mother. She gave birth to seven children, had grandchildren. Most children were sad. She was a good, caring mother.”¹¹⁷

While the belief in witchcraft is protected under the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, this right is limited as “necessary to protect public safety, order, health, morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.”¹¹⁸ Any harmful manifestation of that right would fall within the restriction.¹¹⁹ As such, “states should combat all forms of discrimination and violence against older women accused of witchcraft, including intimidation, isolation, abuse and killings, as well as expulsions from their homes and families, and ensure that the perpetrators are prosecuted and adequately punished.”¹²⁰ That means that the state should immediately investigate incidents of violence, prevent them from reoccurring and strengthen legislation against witchcraft accusations.¹²¹ The former UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary killings emphasized that witchcraft-related violations of the right of life also amount to arbitrary killings, thereby engaging state responsibility.¹²²

All 93 people accused of witchcraft Amnesty International interviewed faced threats and feared for their lives, which prompted them to leave their towns.

4.1.2 LEGAL FRAMEWORK TO ADDRESS WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS AND RELATED ABUSES

Several United Nations bodies noted the need to investigate and prosecute promptly incidents of violence linked to accusations of witchcraft, as well as criminalizing accusations of witchcraft to serve as a deterrent and prevent further incidents.¹²³ The UN advised criminalizing witchcraft accusations and related abuses instead of criminalizing the practice of witchcraft in itself.¹²⁴ The UN Human Rights Committee stated that the respect of the right to life requires that states “enact a protective legal framework that includes effective criminal prohibitions on all manifestations of violence or incitement to violence that are likely to result in deprivation of life, such as intentional and negligent homicide... lynching... ritual killings”.¹²⁵ Witchcraft accusations are considered a harmful practice under international law and states have the duty to “explicitly prohibit by law and adequately sanction or criminalize harmful practices, in accordance with the gravity of the offence and harm caused.”¹²⁶

However, Ghana’s Criminal Offences Act does not specifically criminalize witchcraft accusations. The Nanumba South District Police Commander told Amnesty International that abuses related to witchcraft accusations fall under threats of harm,¹²⁷ threats of death¹²⁸ or trial by ordeal¹²⁹ under the criminal code;

¹¹⁶ Interview in person with Zeinab Mahama, daughter of victim, 29 April 2024, Katiejeli.

¹¹⁷ Interview in person with Mahama Salami, son of the victim, 29 April 2024, Katiejeli.

¹¹⁸ ICCPR, Article 18.

¹¹⁹ OHCHR, Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization (previously cited), para. 12.

¹²⁰ OHCHR, Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization (previously cited), para. 21.

¹²¹ OHCHR, Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization (previously cited), para. 23.

¹²² OHCHR, “Experts propose action to end harmful practices related to witchcraft”, 5 February 2017, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2017/10/experts-propose-action-end-harmful-practices-related-witchcraft#:~:text=The%20UN%20Special%20Rapporteur%20on,arbitrary%20killings%2C%20triggering%20State%20responsibility>.

¹²³ OHCHR, Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization (previously cited), paras. 23; 36; UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Mozambique, 30 July 2019, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/MOZ/CO/3-5, para 24(d).

¹²⁴ OHCHR, Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization (previously cited), paras. 13; 23.

¹²⁵ HCR, General Comment 36 (previously cited), para. 20.

¹²⁶ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Joint General Recommendation 31 and 18, 14 November 2014, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/31-CRC/C/GC/18, para. 12.

¹²⁷ Ghana, Criminal Code, 1960 (Act 29), 1960, <https://home.gis.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Criminal-Offences-Act-1960-Act-29.pdf>, section 74.

¹²⁸ Ghana, Criminal Code (previously cited), section 75.

¹²⁹ Ghana, Criminal Code (previously cited), sections 315, 316.

however, when a person files a complaint “either the whole family or the whole community is against that individual.”¹³⁰ He believes that a law that specifically addresses witchcraft accusations would help his department not only with awareness raising but also with conducting investigations that could lead to prosecutions: “The fuel of it all is the witchcraft accusation and we don't have a substantive law to tell those perpetrators. It is our hope that one day... law enforcement would not be bound by the peripheral issues... If we just prosecute people for threats of death and harm, we're missing the point. They are not on trial for witchcraft accusations, so they think they can continue to do it.”¹³¹

The mediatized death of Akua Denteh prompted a fierce campaign by civil society, namely the Coalition Against Witchcraft Accusations (a coalition of Ghanaian NGOs and individuals passionate about the issue) for a law criminalizing witchcraft accusations. The coalition advocated for the passage of that bill since the killing of Akua Denteh because according to them, a law criminalizing witchcraft accusations and related abuses, is necessary as a deterrent to such behaviours.¹³²

On 27 July 2023, the parliament passed a bill, Criminal Offences (Amendment) Bill 2022 (the bill), which criminalizes various acts related to witchcraft accusations. Under the bill, a person who “professes by action or words to be a witch doctor or a witch finder” commits an offense as well as “a person who, professing to be a witch doctor or a witch finder (a) accuses, names, indicates, labels or declares a person as a witch; (b) administers any substance or test whatsoever to another person for being the perpetrator of an alleged crime or any other act complained of; (c) advises, by use of an unnatural means or by administration of a substance or application of any test whatsoever to another person as the perpetrator of an alleged crime or any other act complained of; or (d) employs or solicits another person to perform” an act prohibited above.¹³³ Moreover, under the bill “a community leader who directly or indirectly permits, promotes, encourages or facilitates the commission of an act” prohibited under the bill and someone who “presides over, is present at or participates in the accusation or declaration of another person as a witch” also commit an offence.¹³⁴ The bill provides for compensation and counselling for the victims as well as a path to reintegration.¹³⁵ However, the bill labels people declaring to be witches to have “severe mental disorder”, which could reinforce stigmatisation against those accused. International law recommends focusing on harmful practices not the underlying belief.¹³⁶

In December 2023, the then president of Ghana declined to sign the bill into law citing constitutional concerns; according to him, the bill should have been introduced in parliament as a public bill instead of a private member's bill.¹³⁷

Akua Denteh's family was grateful that some people were convicted for her death but felt that bystanders and those who instigated the beating should have been punished as well. Her son told Amnesty International: “more people should have been arrested. Those who brought that woman from out of town should have been arrested; those who were standing there as well. The law will help combat this, it would put fear into people... but the president refused to sign it, so the youth think nothing will happen to them.”¹³⁸ He was disappointed that some of the young men who brought the witch doctor from Yendi into Kafaba were initially arrested but were later released.

¹³⁰ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹³¹ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹³² Interview in person with representatives of Songtaba and a representative of Action Aid Ghana, 4 December 2023, Tamale; Interview in person with professor John Azumah, Executive Director of The Sanneh Institute, 28 November 2023, Accra; also see Action Aid Ghana, “Coalition Against Witchcraft Accusation Celebrates Parliament's Historic Passage of the Criminal Offences Amendment Bill, 2022, Proscribing Witchcraft Accusation”, 28 July 2023, <https://ghana.actionaid.org/news/2023/coalition-against-witchcraft-accusation-celebrates-parliaments-historic-passage-criminal>.

¹³³ Ghana, Criminal Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2022.

¹³⁴ Ghana, Criminal Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2022.

¹³⁵ Ghana, Criminal Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2022.

¹³⁶ Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, Report on the expert workshop on witchcraft and human rights, 23 January 2018, A/HRC/37/57/Add.2, para. 65.

¹³⁷ Graphic Online, “President Akufo-Addo on why he cannot sign Witchcraft, other bills due to constitutional issues”, 4 December 2023, <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/president-akufo-addo-on-why-he-cannot-sign-witchcraft-bill-which-defies-article-108.html>. The bill is a private member's bill, that is, it has been introduced by a member of parliament as opposed to a public bill introduced by a minister.

¹³⁸ Interview in person with Mahama Salami, son of victim, 29 April 2024, Katiejeli.

4.2 NO SAFE PLACES

“Whether this is good or not [to live in a camp], this is a place for us, and we have to stay here because we don’t have anywhere to go.”¹³⁹

“Miriam”, woman accused of witchcraft, Gnani camp

Ghana’s duty of due diligence to protect the right to life and security of anyone under its jurisdiction requires not only criminalization, but also “prevention, protection, recovery, reintegration and redress for victims”.¹⁴⁰ However, the national entities and structures in place have failed to properly provide remedies for people who have been accused of witchcraft and banished from their communities.

In the absence of justice and sanction of perpetrators of abuses linked to witchcraft accusations, victims have generally no other choice than to leave the community for their security regardless of the behaviour of chiefs towards these accusations.

4.2.1 THE ROLE OF CHIEFS

In Ghana, chiefs are recognized as enforcers of customary law under Ghanaian law. A chief is statutorily defined as “a person, who, hailing from the appropriate family and lineage, has been validly nominated, elected or selected and enstooled, enskinned or installed as a chief or queen mother in accordance with the relevant customary law and usage”¹⁴¹ and the institution of chieftaincy is guaranteed under the Constitution.¹⁴² The National House of Chiefs is part of the Ministry for Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs and is comprised of paramount chiefs from all the regions that have the duty in part to “undertake an evaluation of traditional customs and usages with a view to eliminating those customs and usages that are outmoded and socially harmful.”¹⁴³ However, chiefs are often unable to protect people accused of witchcraft and sometimes even participate in their expulsion from the community. An NGO worker told Amnesty International: “When the chief gets involved, it becomes even more difficult. In some cases, the youth don’t even consult the chief and do the lynching by themselves; Sometimes the mob justice would happen in the chief’s palace. It used to be a sacred place.”¹⁴⁴ Despite the chief being the most frequent authority the women refer to when they are accused,¹⁴⁵ they do not feel protected enough to stay in their homes. When asked whether the chiefs could protect them after an accusation, the women Amnesty International spoke to responded either that the chiefs knew about the accusation and supported it asking them to leave, or when the chiefs did not support or believe the accusation, the women still left because they felt that the chiefs could not prevent them from being killed. As one accused woman of about 60 years old living in Kukuo explained: “the chiefs have power, but they can’t protect you up to your bedroom.”¹⁴⁶

Konjit, a woman over 70 years old, who had been living in Gambaga camp for eight years at the time of the interview in April 2024, explained to Amnesty International that she had to leave her village after four of her children died and was subsequently accused by her co-spouse and her co-spouse’s children of killing them. Even though the chief was informed, he felt he could not help her: “the chief asked them which proof they had against me, and they said that they did a ceremony, a ritual, and the ceremony guide had confirmed that I was responsible of the death of my children. I didn’t take part in this ceremony. The chief [said] it was not fair that they did a ceremony without me, but he insisted I leave the community, otherwise the children

¹³⁹ Interview in person with “Miriam” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gnani camp, 5 Dec 2023, Gnani camp.

¹⁴⁰ CEDAW/CRC, General Recommendation 31/18 (previously cited), para. 12.

¹⁴¹ Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Ghana_1996, section 277 (as amended in 1996).

¹⁴² Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (previously cited), section 270.

¹⁴³ Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (previously cited), section 272(c).

¹⁴⁴ Interview in person with representatives of Songtaba and a representative of Action Aid, 4 December 2023, Tamale.

¹⁴⁵ CHRAJ and Crossroads international, “Baseline Study Report on Access to Justice and Gender Based Violence Against Elderly Women Alleged As Witches in Ghana” (previously cited), p. 67-68.

¹⁴⁶ Focus group in person with six women, residents of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

of the co-spouse said that they would shoot me and bury me at night so no one would know what happened to me. The chief said that he couldn't handle the issue and that it was beyond his hands."¹⁴⁷

4.2.2 SHELTERS

Most women end up in a camp because they have nowhere else to go due to a lack of state protection, despite Ghana government's obligations according to national law and international human rights conventions Ghana ratified. In all the camps, the recurring theme amongst the women accused is that the accusation starts within the family then spread in the community. Therefore, many women are survivors of domestic violence as broadly defined under national law.¹⁴⁸

According to the Domestic Violence Act 2007, the government must provide shelters for survivors of domestic violence. In reality, there are only four functioning shelters for adults in the country, and they are all run by NGOs.¹⁴⁹ While the government fails to provide public alternatives, NGO-run shelters must go through a long procedure to be able to operate and are funded by private donations. To set up a shelter, an organisation needs to register through the Department of Social Welfare and Development at the Ministry of Gender, apply for a licence through the Department of Gender then wait for officials to come to inspect the place before the organization is provided with the licence.¹⁵⁰ The licence needs to be renewed every year.¹⁵¹ Two staff of two separate private shelters explained that it took years for their shelters to start operating due to delays in obtaining a licence;¹⁵² one said they had to wait for four years to obtain a licence: "the current system is very lacking, even considering how long it took for us to get the licence. Because it is an emergency, women and children are dying! We are now bringing things together to not duplicate efforts. A conversation is happening but there is no follow-up, no structure... There is no official referral in place. DOVVSU [Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit]¹⁵³ needs to have data and track where people are going. You can't even say there is a system, I feel like there is no structure."¹⁵⁴ There are no shelters in the two regions mostly impacted by witchcraft accusations, the Northern and North East regions. Meanwhile, none of the shelters that were operational at the time of writing hosted any women accused of witchcraft.

Survivors of domestic violence are also entitled to benefit from a Domestic Violence fund earmarked in part for providing "basic material support" to them and "for any matter connected with the rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of domestic violence."¹⁵⁵ However, the government does not regularly maintain the fund and survivors rarely benefit from it according to a NGO worker: "there is a provision made in the act for it, but it is not functional. GHS1.8 million (about USD110,000) was put into the fund in the last two years [2021-2023]. Before that, there was nothing in it. It is a win, but at the national level only. The domestic violence fund is centralized, everything has to go through Accra. It is not practical and puts people from the regions away."¹⁵⁶ Amnesty International requested to meet with the Department of Gender and requested information about the Domestic Violence Fund, but did not receive a reply.

4.2.3 FEAR OF BEING ACCUSED AGAIN

Reintegration in communities is often made difficult by the continuity of the accusations. Once someone is accused of witchcraft, there is a risk that this person is accused again. As a result, most women agree to go to the camps and prefer staying there rather than going back to their village.

A widow over 80 years old living in Gnani camp told Amnesty International she came voluntarily to the camp after being accused by her brother of another brother's death. Even though she had performed a ritual outside the camp concluding that she was not guilty, which was confirmed with the ritual in the camp, she decided not to return home: "because I am a woman and I am accused, even though I was found innocent,

¹⁴⁷ Interview in person with Konjit Konlan, resident of Gambaga camp, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

¹⁴⁸ Ghana, Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (Act 732), 2007, [https://www.lawsghana.com/post-1992-legislation/table-of-content/Acts%20of%20Parliament/DOMESTIC%20VIOLENCE%20ACT.%202007%20\(ACT%20732\)/166](https://www.lawsghana.com/post-1992-legislation/table-of-content/Acts%20of%20Parliament/DOMESTIC%20VIOLENCE%20ACT.%202007%20(ACT%20732)/166), Section 2.

¹⁴⁹ Interview in person with Thelma Akyere Gwumah, representative of EU Enough Project at Oxfam, 7 December 2023, Accra.

¹⁵⁰ Interview by video call with the Ark Foundation, 7 February 2024; interview by video call with a staff of a local shelter, 5 February 2024.

¹⁵¹ Interview by video call with the Ark Foundation, 7 February 2024;

¹⁵² Interview by video call with the Ark Foundation, 7 February 2024; interview by video call with a staff of a local shelter, 5 February 2024.

¹⁵³ DOWVSU is a specialized unit of Ghana Police Service handling sexual and gender-based violence complaints; they are often the first point of contact in the government for survivors.

¹⁵⁴ Interview by video call with a staff at a local shelter, 5 February 2024.

¹⁵⁵ Ghana, Domestic Violence Act (previously cited), Section 30.

¹⁵⁶ Interview in person with Thelma Akyere Gwumah, representative of EU Enough Project at Oxfam, 7 December 2023, Accra; also see Ghana News Agency, "Domestic Violence Fund now operational – Caretaker Minister", 16 November 2022, <https://gna.org.gh/2022/11/domestic-violence-fund-now-operational-caretaker-minister/>.

I did not want to come back again because if something else were to happen, I would have been accused again.”¹⁵⁷

Her sentiment is echoed in other women’s stories across the four camps. The risk of staying in their village or going back there is too great for them. They are also afraid of the accusation following them in other villages and the fatal consequences that come along with it, making the camps their only option. Their fear appears to be legitimate. A 75-year-old woman who was accused five years after her husband was, told Amnesty International that even though she left that village to go back to her father’s home, she had to leave again after a week: “when I arrived at my family home my father told me that my name had already been spread in the yard and the community and they had no option than bringing me to the camp.”¹⁵⁸ She resigned herself to remain in the camp; she summarized her experience with these words: “one day they accused me, and I had to run away, just like that.”¹⁵⁹ She is not the only one who initially sought refuge in their parents’ village, but who ultimately had to come to a camp because of rumours spreading. The fear is so strong that even when the person who accused them asks them to come back, some refuse. This is the case of a woman who was reintegrated in another community after spending over 10 years in Kpatinga camp. She said: “I don’t know why he [her co-spouse’s son] accused me. The ones in the house were looking for inheritance. After, the one who accused me was seeking my return, but I refused because I didn’t want to be accused again.”¹⁶⁰



THE STORY OF “ZEINABOU”

“Zeinabou” is about 90 years old and has been in Gambaga camp for over a decade. She told Amnesty International that she felt that she had no other safe place to go because she was accused and abused several times by different members of her family. She was forced to marry by her father and moved to her husband’s village. When her husband died, his brother married her, and that brother’s first wife subsequently accused her of being a witch. Her then husband believed his first wife. Zeinabou went back to her father’s house, but he told her she had to go to Gambaga camp after consulting a soothsayer. After spending more than 10 years in the camp, she left the camp and went to live in her son’s house. However, her attempt at reintegration failed. About four years later, she was accused again during a church service; she told Amnesty International she felt her daughter-in-law had colluded with [members of the church] to get rid of her. She was sent back to the camp: “that day they left me as you leave a goat tied in some place. They said that I should die, so they would never come here to visit me... Where am I going to go? Who am I going home to stay with? I will not go back. If I go to another community, who will take care of me? I don’t know what to do with myself. Those who know me don’t want anything to do with me... I am waiting for my death.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Interview in person with “Corinne” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gnani camp, 5 dec 2023, Gnani camp.

¹⁵⁸ Interview in person with “Miriam” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gnani camp, 5 December 2023, Gnani camp.

¹⁵⁹ Interview in person with “Miriam” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gnani camp, 5 December 2023, Gnani camp.

¹⁶⁰ Interview in person with “Ania” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Kpatinga camp, 4 December 2023, Kpatinga camp.

¹⁶¹ Interview in person with “Zeinabou” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gambaga camp, 23 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

REINTEGRATION

There have been successful cases of reintegration of accused women in other communities; those initiatives are spearheaded and planned by a reintegration committee composed of three NGOs, CHRAJ, DOVVSU, two religious bodies (Muslim and Christian) and a chief, but require a lot of resources.¹⁶² Conversely, some women go back to the camp they were in after failed reintegration attempts. According to representatives of Songtaba and Action Aid Ghana that are part of the reintegration committee, they had 30 successful cases of reintegration and four attempts that were not.¹⁶³ They noted that in order for reintegration to be successful, they need to ensure the safety of the persons being reintegrated, in part by working extensively with the local chiefs, but also by ensuring that there is a family member or another person in the community capable of taking care of them financially.¹⁶⁴

When Amnesty International spoke to “Mara”, a woman of about 60 years old in April 2024, she had been living in the town of Bimbila in the Northern Region for about a year after spending 11 years in Kukuo camp.¹⁶⁵ Bimbila is about 36km away from her hometown where she was accused of being responsible for the death of her son. In Kukuo, it was difficult for her to get water because she had chest pains and could not carry water from the river to the camp. She told Amnesty International: “I was very excited and very happy when I found out that I would be leaving because [my children] moved me away from the water issue in Kukuo... and my roof was leaking when it was raining season, which made it difficult to sleep.”¹⁶⁶ “Mara” did not want to go back to her town.¹⁶⁷ She was able to move to Bimbila after her brother and children came to an agreement with the chief of Bimbila and her children built a house for her there.¹⁶⁸ Although other members of the community are aware that she was accused of being a witch, she does not feel any hostility from them.¹⁶⁹ She is comfortable in her current accommodation where she has a water tank and lives with several members of her family including her daughter-in-law and nephew.¹⁷⁰ When asked how she felt about people who accused her, she told Amnesty International: “They sacked me from [my town] and I was miserable in Kukuo, but look at me now! I have a house and I’m very happy in Bimbila. I put my enemies to shame. Shame on them!”¹⁷¹

All the testimonies above points to a need in Ghana for a strong and well-resourced state policy for the reintegration of accused persons into communities of their choice, and well-established places of protection when such reintegration is difficult.

¹⁶² Interview in person with representatives from Songtaba and a representative from Action Aid Ghana, 4 December 2023, Tamale.

¹⁶³ Representative from Songtaba, email to Amnesty International and a representative of Action Aid Ghana, 17 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

¹⁶⁴ Interview in person with representatives of Songtaba and a representative of Action Aid Ghana, 4 December 2023, Tamale.

¹⁶⁵ Interview in person with “Mara” (name changed for security reasons), former resident of Kukuo camp, 30 April 2024, Bimbila.

¹⁶⁶ Interview in person with “Mara” (name changed for security reasons), former resident of Kukuo camp, 30 April 2024, Bimbila.

¹⁶⁷ Interview in person with “Mara” (name changed for security reasons), former resident of Kukuo camp, 30 April 2024, Bimbila.

¹⁶⁸ Interview in person with “Mara” (name changed for security reasons), former resident of Kukuo camp, 30 April 2024, Bimbila.

¹⁶⁹ Interview in person with “Mara” (name changed for security reasons), former resident of Kukuo camp, 30 April 2024, Bimbila.

¹⁷⁰ Interview in person with “Mara” (name changed for security reasons), former resident of Kukuo camp, 30 April 2024, Bimbila.

¹⁷¹ Interview in person with “Mara” (name changed for security reasons), former resident of Kukuo camp, 30 April 2024, Bimbila.

4.3 LACK OF PREVENTIVE MEASURES

“One of the first steps in combating harmful practices is through prevention. Both [UN] Committees have underlined that prevention can be best achieved through a human rights-based approach to changing social and cultural norms, empowering women and girls, building the capacity of all relevant professionals who are in regular contact with victims, potential victims and perpetrators of harmful practices at all levels, and raising awareness of the causes and consequences of harmful practices, including through dialogue with relevant stakeholders.”¹⁷²

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Joint General Recommendation on harmful practices

While legislation to punish witchcraft accusations and related abuses as well as the establishment of state-run reintegration and shelter programmes to protect victims are important, the issue cannot be addressed without changing social norms including by combatting gender and age discrimination and empowering women, particularly older women.

OHCHR stressed the need to undertake “public education programmes highlighting the negative impact of accusations of witchcraft, targeting both men and women, as well as community and villages chiefs and religious leaders, and raising awareness, particularly in rural areas, of the criminal nature of such attacks.”¹⁷³ However, the government has not put in place an effective and well-coordinated national strategy and enough resources to educate the affected population and teach vulnerable women about their rights. Amnesty International spoke to over 50 women across all the camps who were not aware of their right, under Ghanaian law, to file a complaint with the police.

Ghana National Gender Policy has as its objective “to mainstream gender equality concerns into the national development processes by improving the social, legal, civic, political, economic and socio-cultural conditions of the people of Ghana particularly women, girls, children, the vulnerable and people with special needs; persons with disability and the marginalized.”¹⁷⁴ The policy specifically mentions the role the CHRAJ has been playing in combatting various harmful cultural practices including witchcraft accusations.¹⁷⁵ The CHRAJ was established as a national human rights institution by a parliamentary statute and receive governmental funding.¹⁷⁶ However, according to the CHRAJ, they are facing challenges fulfilling their responsibilities due to inadequate funding.¹⁷⁷ Nonetheless, the CHRAJ was able to work towards changing social norms by providing technical support to other organisations within their own budget and securing various forms of external funding.¹⁷⁸ The commission’s initiatives include a collaboration with the NGO Crossroad International in 2022 to conduct a study on sexual and gender-based violence against older

¹⁷² CEDAW/CRC, General Recommendation 31/18 (previously cited), para. 55.

¹⁷³ OHCHR, Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization (previously cited), para. 24.

¹⁷⁴ Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (Ministry of Gender), National Gender Policy, May 2015, <https://www.mogcsp.gov.gh/mdocs-posts/national-gender-policy/>, p. VII.

¹⁷⁵ Ministry of Gender, National Gender Policy (previously cited), p. 29.

¹⁷⁶ Ghana, Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice Act (Act 456), 1993, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1993/en/14964>.

¹⁷⁷ Citi Newsroom, “Inadequate funding constraining our mandate – CHRAJ”, 6 July 2023, <https://citinewsroom.com/2023/07/inadequate-funding-constraining-our-mandate-chraj/>; CHRAJ, “Inadequate funding constraining our mandate – CHRAJ”, 2023, <https://chraj.gov.gh/news/inadequate-funding-constraining-our-mandate-chraj/>.

¹⁷⁸ Interview in person with CHRAJ, 3 May 2024, Accra.

women. Between June 2023 and July 2024, the CHRAJ delivered sensitisation programmes on witchcraft accusations in the East Mamprusi, Gushegu, Nanumba South and Yendi districts in the Northern and North East regions through funding from the French embassy.¹⁷⁹ They targeted specifically students and the youth, and engaged in stakeholders' consultations with teachers, parliamentarians, religious, and traditional leaders.¹⁸⁰ They built on the momentum of the bill against witchcraft accusations passed in parliament in July 2023 to educate people; they told Amnesty International: "During that period, there were no issues because people realized if they continued acting that way, the law will deal with them, but recently we have heard those accusations again."¹⁸¹ Within their own budget, the CHRAJ also provides general sensitisations through their public education department, not specifically on witchcraft.¹⁸² The CHRAJ also assists with reintegration efforts as part of the reintegration committee with NGOs. Despite their efforts, there is still a need for stronger interventions with sufficient resources for the CHRAJ in the Northern and North East regions to ensure regular sensitizations on traditional harmful practices sustained over time.

The Nanumba South District Assembly, the governmental entity governing the district where Kukuo is located used radio stations to do sensitisations from 2020 to 2023.¹⁸³ The funding for the radio show came from Action Aid and was implemented by the assembly.¹⁸⁴ The main topic of the show focused on combatting contemporary forms of slavery, but they took advantage of the programme to popularize the bill against witchcraft in 2023.¹⁸⁵ The radio programme was on twice a week and was broadcasted in the municipalities of Kpandai, Salaga, Nkwanta and Bimbila.¹⁸⁶ They targeted communities where the belief that no one can die without a spiritual cause is prevalent.¹⁸⁷ The local assembly also reached out to national assembly members from the Konkomba ethnic group where this belief is rampant and asked them to educate their respective communities. However, they cannot verify whether they did.¹⁸⁸ The Assembly does not systematically work on reintegration efforts for the women in the camp but assists if asked.¹⁸⁹

The Nanumba South District Police Commander explained that his police unit does sensitizations when there are opportunities, and they have the resources for it.¹⁹⁰ According to him, distance and the lack of resources – be they human or financial – make sensitisation more challenging.¹⁹¹ They do not have a particular timeline for sensitisation, but he estimates that they would be able to go to a community every two to three months.¹⁹² By the end of April 2024, his department had performed two sensitisations sessions in two different communities that year.¹⁹³ He also noted that even though the Domestic Violence Act specifies that psycho-social support should be available to the victims, "on the ground it is non-existent."¹⁹⁴ Similarly to the CHRAJ, he capitalized on the passage of the Criminal Offences (Amendment) Bill in parliament to educate people on the criminalization of witchcraft accusations.¹⁹⁵

The East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, the governmental entity managing the district where Gambaga camp is located does not engage in any sensitisations in the communities impacted by witchcraft accusations within their district.¹⁹⁶

The local government overseeing Kpatinga camp told Amnesty International that they do sensitisation on the issue as part of their community engagement activities when funds are available, the last time being early February 2025.¹⁹⁷

While there are several initiatives to educate the youth, engage with traditional leaders and empower women, these are sporadic and depend heavily on NGOs. Songtaba and Action Aid Ghana have been consistently active in the impacted regions for over a decade providing sensitisations to the communities, engaging with

¹⁷⁹ Interview in person with CHRAJ, 3 May 2024, Accra.

¹⁸⁰ Interview in person with CHRAJ, 3 May 2024, Accra.

¹⁸¹ Interview in person with CHRAJ, 3 May 2024, Accra.

¹⁸² Interview in person with CHRAJ, 3 May 2024, Accra.

¹⁸³ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁸⁴ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁸⁵ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁸⁶ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁸⁷ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁸⁸ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁸⁹ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁹⁰ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁹¹ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁹² Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁹³ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁹⁴ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁹⁵ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Police Commander, 30 April 2024, Wulensi.

¹⁹⁶ Interview in person with East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, 25 April 2024, Gambaga.

¹⁹⁷ Social Welfare Officer at Gushegu Municipal Assembly, email to Amnesty International, 17 February 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

relevant stakeholders and intervening where possible to avoid the banishment of women from their villages.¹⁹⁸

Even though the passage of the Criminal Offences (Amendment) Bill by parliament spurred more awareness-raising initiatives, it is unclear whether those initiatives will continue after the then president rejected to sign the bill into law. Notwithstanding, the sporadic efforts to educate the population on the issue are not enough to actively and comprehensively combat stereotypes linked to witchcraft accusations.

¹⁹⁸ Songtaba, "Women's Rights and Governance", <https://www.songtaba.org/project/womens-rights/>; Action Aid Ghana, "Protecting the Vulnerable: Witchcraft Accusations and Human Rights Abuses in Ghana", 2015, <https://ghana.actionaid.org/publications/2015/protecting-vulnerable-witchcraft-accusations-and-human-rights-abuses-ghana#downloads>.

5. CHALLENGING CONDITIONS IN THE CAMPS

5.1 STANDARD OF LIVING

5.1.1 ACCESS TO FOOD AND LIVELIHOOD

“I miss a lot [from home]. I had everything. I was harvesting shea nuts. Back then, money was coming in, I could possess a lot of things, sell things and make money. Now, if someone doesn't feed me, how would I eat? Sometimes I think of the old days, and I shake my head.”¹⁹⁹

Mariama Wambie, woman accused of witchcraft, Kukuo

Most women interviewed by Amnesty International in all the camps did not have time to take any belongings with them to the camp except the clothes they were wearing at the time, due to the chaos the accusation sparked. “Aisha” who fled to Gambaga camp told the organization: “I had an infant child, about two months old [...] I had a cloth to cover my child and what I was wearing. That's all I had when I came here.”²⁰⁰ Some women managed to get some of their cooking utensils and clothes afterwards when their children brought them to the camp, but others never got any of their belongings back. They were forced to rebuild their lives without access to most of their belongings and with limited access to livelihoods within the camps.

There is no governmental assistance specifically allocated for people accused of witchcraft, but people in the camps are eligible to receive some financial support through the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme, a governmental cash assistance programme. In practice, however, many do not receive the funding because they are not registered into the programme, and those who are, do not receive it regularly. To sustain themselves, women work and rely on donations.

Farming and other activities

¹⁹⁹ Interview in person with Mariama Wambie, resident of Kukuo camp, 27 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²⁰⁰ Interview in person with “Aisha” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gambaga camp, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

Some women in all the camps found opportunities to work in local farms in exchange for food. Others said that they did petty trading, sold charcoal or picked and sold dry wood in order to survive. However, women who were older or otherwise physically unable to work were at higher risk of not getting sufficient food. They solely depended on support from others.

In Kpatinga camp, getting food is a challenge, as the executive director of The Sanneh Institute explained: “In Kpatinga, it is very tough to get food. They go to the neighbouring farms to help, they may get a small basket, a bowl for their pay or the majority go to the market and, sweep the market or some would resort to begging... some are supported by family or NGOs.”²⁰¹ According to the women in the camp Amnesty International spoke to, they get a small quantity of food (a basin of food of about 15kg) during the harvesting season after working in villagers’ farms.²⁰² They also go to villagers’ farms after harvesting and take what villagers have left behind. Some go to the market during market days and gather food left behind. Others rely on support from others. “Ramata”, a widow over 75 years old who has been living in Kpatinga for 13 years, used to farm in her hometown where she was living with her brother and children, but is now unable to do any farm work and solely relies on donations from others to eat.²⁰³ She told Amnesty International: “I’m weak now. I’m just staying here because I don’t have any options... To eat I get food from [Songtaba], some Christian organization... and a white lady that brings us food. I’m not working here. I’m just sitting.”²⁰⁴

In Gambaga, Amnesty International’s delegation was able to observe that the women are selling soaps and beads the Go Home Project helped them make in addition to farming activities. However, it is not always enough. “Ata” a woman about 45 years old used to make enough money to sustain herself by selling fruits and mullet cakes in her hometown where she was living with her husband and children.²⁰⁵ Since she arrived in the camp alone, she has to combine several activities to make ends meet: “I go to carry firewood. I also sell some of the soaps when they [others] make it. The firewood, I sell it for about 5 cedis [USD 0.33]; for soap if I sell it for 200 cedis [USD 13.18], I make 20 cedis [USD 1.32], and the owner gets the rest.”²⁰⁶ The women also receive assistance from the presbyterian church that provides food to the women who cannot work.²⁰⁷ The local government does not have any programme to help with livelihood activities or food in the camp.²⁰⁸

In Kukuo camp, the women face similar challenges as selling firewood and farming requires long hours of work and the ability to do strenuous physical activity for little return. The women Amnesty International interviewed in the camp expressed how hard it was to have food every day, especially after harvesting season. As Adisa, a woman about 60 years old explained: “it is not enough especially when the harvest time has ended. We starve sometimes.”²⁰⁹ Arrshetu, a woman about 65 years old with high blood pressure who used to make a good living as a merchant in her hometown without any assistance from the government told Amnesty International that after she came to the camp around 2014 with her daughter, she was unable to provide for both of them: “[My daughter] is over 15 now. She is working in Accra. She has a job selling porridge. She has a [boss]. She didn’t go to school. I couldn’t afford it. I don’t have anybody here to support me... To live I sell firewood. I also receive some support from the government. It is not regular, but I appreciate it.”²¹⁰ The women otherwise rely on help from family members or the chief or others in the community.

People accused of witchcraft in Gnani also have reduced access to livelihood opportunities and food in the camp. They help in other people’s farms and sell firewood when they can, but many people heavily depend on the help of the chief priest of the camp and donations from NGOs to eat. Gari, a woman over 50 years who was living with her family and making a living as a farmer without government assistance in her hometown told Amnesty International that she now struggles to make ends meet in the camp: “I stay alone here. I don’t do any work; I do small activities. I also help the wife of the chief with farming. I struggle to get money to buy something. I carry firewood and sell it. I go far, sometimes I have to cross the river to get firewood. It is three hours one way. If I want strong firewood, I have to cross the river. I sell it 2 cedis [USD 0.13] for a small bundle of wood... I pick only 6 or 5 at a time because it is tiring... Since morning I haven’t had anything to eat; my stomach is empty. In the afternoon and evening, I try to find something to eat; so I eat like twice a day. I feel embarrassed when I have to go to the chief and ask for food.”²¹¹

²⁰¹ Interview in person with professor John Azumah, Executive Director of The Sanneh Institute, 28 November 2023, Accra.

²⁰² Interview in person with residents of Kpatinga camp, 4 December 2023, Kpatinga camp.

²⁰³ Interview in person with “Ramata” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Kpatinga camp, 4 December 2023, Kpatinga camp.

²⁰⁴ Interview in person with “Ramata” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Kpatinga camp, 4 December 2023, Kpatinga camp.

²⁰⁵ Interview in person with “Ata” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gambaga camp, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²⁰⁶ Interview in person with “Ata” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gambaga camp, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²⁰⁷ Interview in person with Gladys Lariba Mahama, Gambaga Outcast Home Project Coordinator, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²⁰⁸ Interview in person with East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, 25 April 2024, Gambaga.

²⁰⁹ Focus group in person with six women, residents of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²¹⁰ Interview in person with Arrshetu Abdoulaye, resident of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²¹¹ Interview in person with Gari Nyigul, resident of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Ghana is bound to ensuring the realization of the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food.²¹²

The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme

In 2008, the government set up the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme to provide cash for “extremely poor and vulnerable households”.²¹³ Those eligible for cash assistance under the programme include: “orphaned and vulnerable children”, persons “severely disabled without productive capacity”, “extremely poor or vulnerable households with pregnant women and mothers with infants” and older persons who are 65 years and above “without any form of support”.²¹⁴ The objectives of the programme include: “improve basic household consumption and nutrition”, “increase access to health care services” and “facilitate access to complementary services (such as welfare, livelihoods and improvement of productive capacity) among beneficiary households”.²¹⁵ The government selects districts then communities within the selected districts using Ghana Statistical Service “poverty data.”²¹⁶

The LEAP secretariat within the Ministry of Gender in Accra informs the local governments when they can conduct registration in selected communities.²¹⁷ The social welfare officers at the district level then use a standard questionnaire to interview households within a community to determine eligibility.²¹⁸ The local government then sends back the information to the head office. The secretariat decides which households qualify for LEAP and informs the local governments.²¹⁹ The district social welfare officers subsequently give cards to selected households to have access to the cash assistance.²²⁰ The social welfare officers work with community focal persons within the communities to help with the implementation.²²¹

People are registered to LEAP by households and the amount of cash provided depends on the number of eligible household members.²²² The beneficiaries should be paid every two months.²²³ LEAP registration is done in phases depending on money available in the LEAP programme and the government receive financial assistance from development partners to finance the programme.²²⁴ UNICEF, the World Bank and UKAID are amongst the donors that have helped fund the programme.²²⁵

The Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights noted in 2018 regarding LEAP the need to expand its coverage, increase the amount provided to beneficiaries, improve coordination with other social protection initiatives and provide assurance as to its financing.²²⁶ From the interviews Amnesty International conducted in all the camps in 2023 and 2024, the same issues seemed to persist.

According to the Nanumba South District Assembly, there were 6,310 people registered under the LEAP programme in the district as of April 2024.²²⁷ A registration targeting specifically the women in Kukuo camp was done in 2023: “we specifically enrolled the women in the “witch camp” about eight months ago [August 2023]. Thanks to partners like Songtaba who raised attention of the government. Before that, they were registered as Kukuo residents in general, not as members of the “witch camp” specifically... We registered all people specifically in the camp. 170 women were registered in the camp at the time. This is the most recent registration that we have done.”²²⁸ The camp manager told Amnesty International that they were 178

²¹² International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 11.

²¹³ Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, “Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP)”, <https://www.mogcsp.gov.gh/projects/livelihood-empowerment-against-poverty-leap/>.

²¹⁴ Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty, “Eligibility Criteria”, <https://leap.mogcsp.gov.gh/eligibility-criteria/>.

²¹⁵ Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, “Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP)”, <https://www.mogcsp.gov.gh/projects/livelihood-empowerment-against-poverty-leap/>.

²¹⁶ Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty, “Eligibility Criteria”, <https://leap.mogcsp.gov.gh/eligibility-criteria/>.

²¹⁷ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi;

²¹⁸ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi;

²¹⁹ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi; Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme, “Institutional Arrangement”, <https://leap.mogcsp.gov.gh/management/institutional-arrangement/>.

²²⁰ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi;

²²¹ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi; Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme, “Institutional Arrangement”, <https://leap.mogcsp.gov.gh/management/institutional-arrangement/>.

²²² Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme, “Payments”, <https://leap.mogcsp.gov.gh/management/payments/>; Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

²²³ Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme, “Payments”, <https://leap.mogcsp.gov.gh/management/payments/>.

²²⁴ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi; Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme, “Frequently Asked Questions”, <https://leap.mogcsp.gov.gh/faq/>.

²²⁵ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi; Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme, “Frequently Asked Questions”, <https://leap.mogcsp.gov.gh/faq/>.

²²⁶ UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Report: *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights on his Mission to Ghana*, 10 October 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/38/33/Add.2, para.60.

²²⁷ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

²²⁸ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

accused women in the camp when the organization visited in April 2024. Three women Amnesty International spoke to said that they did not receive any financial assistance from the government. This is the case of Awabo, a widow of about 70 years old who fled to Kukuo camp with her two children when she was accused of causing the sickness of a neighbour in her hometown: “I receive no LEAP. When they did the mass registration, they told me that my name is not part of the ones selected. I was here a long time before they started registration. They did not tell me why I did not qualify.”²²⁹ The local government explained why that might be the case: “it is most likely that people would say they are not registered because we don't register individuals, we register people as households. It is one person we give the card to. Someone else in their family is probably registered... Ghana households registration data is the baseline we use.”²³⁰ However, they conceded that some women might have fallen through the cracks as registration is not done automatically upon arrival in the camp and that the registration in 2023 was only done once: “it could be that some people were not present during that specific registration. If someone arrived after that specific registration, we cannot enroll them into the programme until we get the green light from the secretariat in Accra to register again and then we can include them. However, it is our responsibility to note new arrivals, but we don't have that system in place right now. We need to work with Songtaba to get up-to-date information... so when we receive the green light to register again, we already have the names of the people that have arrived after the last registration.”²³¹ The frequency for registration in the district is about every two years and NGOs help trigger registration through their advocacy.²³²

According to Nanumba South District Assembly, as of April 2024, in Kukuo, a one-person household was entitled to GHS128 [about USD 7.80] per payment, while a household of three or more persons was entitled to GHS172 [about USD 10.50].²³³ The majority of the 33 women Amnesty International interviewed told the organization that they do not always receive the money as frequently as they should. According to them and a Kukuo Assemblyman who helps the women with LEAP and other concerns, they experience delays in payments that can last over four months, and they do not necessarily receive backpay when that happens.²³⁴ Mahama, a widow who had been in the camp for 14 years when we spoke to her in April 2024 explained: “I receive LEAP from the government. It is usually 60 cedis [about USD 3.67], sometimes 120. It doesn't come regularly. This year [2024] I have received it only once.”²³⁵ The Nanumba South District Assembly confirmed that payments can sometimes be delayed: “normally it comes every two months, that it is when we get the money but sometimes it elapses, it takes longer, like three or four months.”²³⁶ Moreover, LEAP is not enough to cover all their basic needs. Mariama, a woman over 80 years old who is unable to walk said: “I receive LEAP, about 80 cedis [USD 5.17]. It doesn't come regularly. Sometimes it takes three months, sometimes it takes four months, sometimes six months. It varies... Look at my situation, if it was not for charity, who would give me food and medicine? So it is not enough.”²³⁷ The local government also told Amnesty International that they were considering participating in the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project, a support programme piloted by the government and the World Bank aiming to teach selected people livelihood skills then give them capital and basic materials to start their business. The project targets in part LEAP beneficiaries.²³⁸

According to the East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, even though they still use the LEAP questionnaire to determine eligibility for the programme, all people in Gambaga camp qualify for LEAP, and the payment is done every three months.²³⁹ The national directive specifies that the payment should in fact be done every two months,²⁴⁰ and the project manager in the camp told Amnesty International that the payments were generally done every two months in 2024.²⁴¹ The local government stated that payment can be delayed but would eventually be done.²⁴² A staff from the local government goes to the camp with an officer from Accra to identify new people and register them. There were 5,001 people on LEAP in the municipality of Mamprusi as of April 2024.²⁴³ In Gambaga camp, the presbyterian church help make sure that every person entering

²²⁹ Interview in person with Awabo Dana, resident of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²³⁰ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

²³¹ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

²³² Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

²³³ Social Welfare Officer at Nanumba South District Assembly, Wulensi, email to Amnesty International, 29 April 2024, on file with Amnesty International.

²³⁴ Hon. Issah Abdul-Aziz, Kukuo assemblyman, whatsapp voice note to Amnesty International, 27 January 2025.

²³⁵ Interview in person with Mahama Ajishetu, resident of Kukuo camp, 27 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²³⁶ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

²³⁷ Interview in person with Mariama Wambie, resident of Kukuo camp, 27 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²³⁸ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi; Ministry of Local Government Decentralisation and Rural Development, “About GPSNP”, <http://mlgrd.gov.gh/gpsnp/index.php/about-the-project/background>.

²³⁹ Interview in person with East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, 25 April 2024, Gambaga.

²⁴⁰ Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme, “Payments”, <https://leap.mogcsp.gov.gh/management/payments/>.

²⁴¹ Gladys Lariba Mahama, Gambaga Outcast Home Project Coordinator, whatsapp message to Amnesty International, 28 January 2025.

²⁴² Interview in person with East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, 25 April 2024, Gambaga.

²⁴³ Interview in person with East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, 25 April 2024, Gambaga.

the camp is eventually registered for LEAP.²⁴⁴ However, Amnesty International spoke to one woman who was over 80 years old who returned to the camp after a failed attempt of reintegration and told Amnesty International that she does not receive any LEAP: “I don’t receive any money from anyone, but because of my age, the coordinator comes and she gives me some money, sometimes 20 cedis [USD 1.29] to buy ingredients or cola.”²⁴⁵ Moreover, as in Kukuo camp, the women feel that the money they receive is not enough to meet their basic needs. “Aisha”, a widow with six children (four in the camp) told Amnesty International: “If I am sick, I go to the hospital. If I don’t have enough money to pay for the bill, I borrow from my colleagues... We also getting money with the LEAP card, about 125 cedis [USD 8] every three months. I can use that to buy food... It is not enough”.²⁴⁶

Unlike Gambaga, there is no NGO specifically dedicated to managing Gnani camp, the largest camp with over 200 persons living there. According to a 2020 financial report from the government, all people in the camp were beneficiaries of the LEAP programme.²⁴⁷ However, at the time Amnesty International visited the camp in 2024, the chief priest was unable to tell how many people were registered in the programme but told Amnesty International that payments to some residents had stopped.²⁴⁸ According to Songtaba and Action Aid Ghana that regularly visit and assist the residents of the camp, there were only 109 people (10 men, 99 women) on LEAP in Gnani camp in 2024.²⁴⁹ Out of the 10 accused men Amnesty delegation spoke to in Gnani, seven were enrolled in the LEAP programme.²⁵⁰ The three who were not receiving LEAP explained that it was either because they missed registration, or officials took their names over a year ago but they were still not registered.²⁵¹ Amnesty International also spoke to Ayi, a 70-year-old widow who lives alone in the camp and who arrived in Gnani around 2018 but who told the organization she still hasn’t been registered for LEAP: “I don’t get any support from the government. I’m not on the LEAP programme. I don’t know why I’m not part of this programme.”²⁵² The people Amnesty International spoke to who received LEAP noted that it was not enough. This is the case of Tidal who explained: “I get LEAP, 120 cedis [USD 7.76]... It is not often, once in a while. I have not received it for the past three months. As I am sitting here, I am sick, I don’t have food to eat. I was registered for LEAP here. I stayed here a long time before I was registered. It is not enough because I am sick. I have to divide it [the LEAP money], some for medicine and some for food to eat.”²⁵³

According to Gushegu Municipal Assembly, the local government overseeing Kpatinga camp, as of January 2025, there were 5,260 people under the LEAP programme in Gushegu district.²⁵⁴ However, only seven women in the camp are registered as the last registration process in the camp was conducted in November 2020.²⁵⁵ The local government confirmed that the frequency of registration is at the directive of the Ministry of Gender and told the organization that the LEAP amount ranges from 256 cedis [USD 16.63] for one household member eligible to 424 cedis [USD 27.54] for four or more eligible household members.²⁵⁶ The local government said that although the payments should be done every two months, funds can sometimes be delayed for more than four months.²⁵⁷

²⁴⁴ Interview in person with Gladys Lariba Mahama, Gambaga Outcast Home Project Coordinator, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²⁴⁵ Interview in person with “Zeinabou” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gambaga camp, 23 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²⁴⁶ Interview in person with “Aisha” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gambaga camp, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²⁴⁷ Ghana, “Composite budget for 2020-2023 programme based budget estimates for 2020 Yendi municipal”, 2020, [Yendi.pdf](#), p.27.

²⁴⁸ Interview in person with the chief priest of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

²⁴⁹ Representative from Songtaba, email to Amnesty International and a representative of Action Aid Ghana, 17 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

²⁵⁰ Focus group in person with 10 men, residents of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

²⁵¹ Focus group in person with 10 men, residents of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

²⁵² Interview in person with Ayi Osman, resident of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

²⁵³ Interview in person with Tidal Bisan, resident of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

²⁵⁴ Social Welfare Officer at Gushegu Municipal Assembly, email to Amnesty International, 28 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

²⁵⁵ Social Welfare Officer at Gushegu Municipal Assembly, email to Amnesty International, 28 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

²⁵⁶ Social Welfare Officer at Gushegu Municipal Assembly, email to Amnesty International, 28 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

²⁵⁷ Social Welfare Officer at Gushegu Municipal Assembly, email to Amnesty International, 28 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.



THE STORY OF ZINA: “NOBODY IS TAKING CARE OF US. EVEN THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT TAKING CARE OF US.”²⁵⁸



← Photo of Zina in Kukuo © Amnesty International

Women in the camps who have a disability, a health condition or do not have any adult male children are particularly at risk, and they heavily depend on help from others.²⁵⁹

Zina a woman over 70 years old who used to be a farmer in her hometown ran to Kukuo around 2004 after she was accused of the death of a boy: “it was my brother who defended me and took me out. If not, they would have killed me. Some of them were holding sticks. The youth gathered. Instead of appeasing them, the older men were encouraging them. They said, “see her off”, instead of stopping them. That means taking me somewhere and kill me; but my brother said no. There were more than 100, I can’t count. The whole place was ready to beat me. They started from my house and at the palace it was even worse. There were even more people.”²⁶⁰ Zina has no children. She now lives in the camp with her brother’s teenage grandson who stopped going to school to help her by farming. No one

visits her in the camp. Zina used to farm and collect firewood to sell in the camp, but she stopped when she hurt her knee three years ago. Now it is difficult for her to stand. She depends on her neighbours for food and water: “I don’t have food to eat right now. I don’t work. I don’t have food as we’re speaking. In the morning, I buy porridge if I can find it. It’s about one cedi [USD 0.066], if not, I fast until people come back from farming and give me some. So, I cannot determine how much I eat every day. I get leftovers. I receive LEAP of 100 cedis [USD 6.47] but for three months or four months now they have not given it to us... It would take four to five months before it comes.”²⁶¹ Now she is hoping the government will come up with policies to help the next generation: “if the government is coming up with policies to protect the next generation, it is fine, but by then I will be gone.”²⁶²

As of 30 September 2024, the government had a directive setting the amount people would receive under LEAP to be 512 cedis [USD 33.64] for households with one eligible member, 608 cedis [USD 39.95] for two eligible members, 704 cedis [USD 46.25] for three and 848 cedis [USD 55.72] for four or more.²⁶³ Although this is an increase from the amount people were receiving when Amnesty International visited the camps, the directive must be applied homogeneously across all the districts, the payments must be continuous and all people within the camps should be registered.

Moreover, the lack of a governmental programme aimed at specifically supporting victims of witchcraft accusations makes them vulnerable to the efficiency or lack thereof of local authorities who can determine whether they benefit from other initiatives. Despite the Ghanaian government’s initiative to provide some financial assistance to impoverished persons, it is insufficient and not regular enough to provide an adequate standard of living to accused persons in the camps. The government failed to ensure accused persons who are particularly vulnerable and unable to provide for themselves have economic and physical access to food as required under international law.²⁶⁴

5.1.2 HOUSING

According to international law, “the right to housing should be ensured to all persons irrespective of income or access to economic resources” and the right of housing refers to adequate housing which includes

²⁵⁸ Interview in person with Zina Woumbi, resident of Kukuo camp, 27 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²⁵⁹ Interview in person with representatives of Songtaba and a representative of Action Aid Ghana, 4 December 2023, Tamale.

²⁶⁰ Interview in person with Zina Woumbi, resident of Kukuo camp, 27 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²⁶¹ Interview in person with Zina Woumbi, resident of Kukuo camp, 27 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²⁶² Interview in person with Zina Woumbi, resident of Kukuo camp, 27 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²⁶³ Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme, Home, <https://leap.mogcsp.gov.gh/> (accessed on 27 January 2025).

²⁶⁴ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, (CESCR), General Comment 12: The Rights to Adequate Food (Art. 11), 12 May 1999, UN Doc. E/C.12/1999/5.

“habitability” and “adequate basic infrastructure”.²⁶⁵ Regarding the former, the living accommodations in all the camps can get damp and allow rain inside; concerning the latter, the people in the camps, especially people with disabilities, do not have easy access to clean water. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also stressed the importance of states to “give due priority to those social groups living in unfavourable conditions by giving them particular consideration.”²⁶⁶

When they arrive in the camps, persons accused of witchcraft generally move into empty rooms that are already available. If housing is not available, the community or the person’s family help with the cost and construction of one.

In Kpatinga, the women live in huts made with sturdy material and aluminium roofs, but the accommodations are old. Each woman sleeps in one hut with her children or the grandchildren she lives with. In 2022, a news report alleged that the women were forced to pay rent to the priest who owns the camp for their accommodations in Kpatinga camp.²⁶⁷ When Amnesty international spoke to the executive director of The Sanneh Institute in December 2023, he said: “World Vision put some structures for the women, but it is old and now the priest, the shrine owner make them pay rent charges, so they have to pay every week or every month...”²⁶⁸ However, the local government told Amnesty International in February 2025 that the residents do not pay anything to the priest for housing in the camp.²⁶⁹

In Gambaga, the persons accused of witchcraft either each live in huts made with mud and grass roof or they share a building with multiple rooms made with cement. The Presbyterian World Service & Development, the international development agency of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, constructed the block cement rooms and helps with the maintenance of the huts: “the huts were there since the beginning with the chief palace. Some accused women come and help reconstruct collapsed ones. The church helps those with no children.”²⁷⁰ In Kukuo, the women live in similar huts side by side with the locals. The priest told Amnesty International: “it is the victim’s family members who construct them. If not, we find a temporal place until they find money to build one for them. For maintenance, it is the community members who do it out of their will. The relatives also support in maintaining structures.”²⁷¹ In Gnani camp, people also live in huts. The chief priest told Amnesty International that he helps with the cost of maintenance of the huts: “each person has a room. If someone leaves or passes away, someone else will take up the room. We bear the cost of it... For the maintenance of the room, I do it.”²⁷²

In Gambaga, Kukuo and Gnani camps the women described similar issues with housing accommodations: the need for the floor to be redone and water getting into their rooms during raining season. Madoyibu who arrived in Gnani in 2022 said: “I’m still in the same hut then when I arrived. The hut is not good. The roof leaks when it rains, and the floor needs to be redone. I sleep on the floor.”²⁷³ “Miriam” who has been living in Gnani since 2013 concurred: “we would need better rooms, better accommodation. During the rainy season, from April to August the roofs of our huts are leaking.”²⁷⁴ “Khadidja”, an older woman who lives alone in Gnani camp feels no one can help her with her housing situation; she had six children, but they all passed away: “our huts are leaking with the rain now that I’m alone and weak who is going to fix it for me?”²⁷⁵ In kukuo camp, Arrshetu echoed her sentiment: “I don’t have anybody here to support me. I live alone in the hut. I can’t afford to buy a mattress. I sleep on a mat... In rainy season it rains inside the hut.”²⁷⁶ “Alimata” who has been in Gambaga camp since around 2014 also struggles with her accommodation: “I have my own room here, but it needs reroofing. Water comes down through the roof when it rains. They gave me some grass to reroof it. I sleep on a mat.”²⁷⁷ Zumera who arrived in Gambaga around the same time also raised concerns about her room: “the room is not good. The floor has gone bad. I sleep alone on a mat. I use my used clothes as a pillow.”²⁷⁸

²⁶⁵ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment 4: The Right to Adequate Housing (Art. 11 (1) of the Covenant), 13 December 1991, UN Doc. E/1992/23, paras 7-8.

²⁶⁶ CESCR, General Comment 4 (previously cited), para 11.

²⁶⁷ JoyNews, “Some women at the Kpatinga witch camp claim they are forced to pay for their stay”, 2 June 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdrTo8TQUqA> (graphic content).

²⁶⁸ Interview in person with professor John Azumah, Executive Director of The Sanneh Institute, 28 November 2023, Accra.

²⁶⁹ Social Welfare Officer at Gushegu Municipal Assembly, email to Amnesty International, 17 February 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

²⁷⁰ Interview in person with Gladys Lariba Mahama, Gambaga Outcast Home Project Coordinator, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²⁷¹ Interview in person with the chief priest of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²⁷² Interview in person with the chief priest of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

²⁷³ Interview in person with Madoyibu Bayam, resident of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

²⁷⁴ Interview in person with “Miriam” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gnani camp, 5 December 2023, Gnani camp.

²⁷⁵ Interview in person with “Khadidja” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gnani camp, 5 December 2023, Gnani camp.

²⁷⁶ Interview in person with Arrshetu Abdoulaye, resident of Gnani camp, 28 April 2024, Gnani camp.

²⁷⁷ Interview in person with “Alimata” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gambaga camp, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²⁷⁸ Interview in person with Zumera Abubakar, resident of Gambaga camp, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

In all the camps, the women struggle with the maintenance of their accommodation and must rely on the help of the chief or NGOs. Because they are particularly vulnerable and unable to provide adequate accommodation for themselves, the government has the duty to fulfil that basic need and failed to do so.



 ↑ A hut in Gnani camp. © Amnesty International

5.1.3 ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER

The Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) operates under the direction of the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resource and has managed the water supply in rural areas and small towns since 1998. The CWSA is established in all the regions of the country.²⁷⁹ Under a policy reform process in 2017, the CWSA started moving away from a community ownership and management model relying on communities for the planning, implementation and management of water supply to a “more coordinated and professionalized operation and management of small-town water supply systems.”²⁸⁰ As a result, the CWSA

²⁷⁹ Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, National Water Policy, April 2024, <https://washghana.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Ghana-Water-Policy-2024.pdf>, p. 31.

²⁸⁰ Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, National Water Policy (previously cited), p. 32.

extended its mandate to manage small towns piped water supply systems as a public utility organization.²⁸¹ Although access to water supply in rural areas rose from 27% in 1992 to 61.61% in 2021, some communities still do not have access.²⁸² Ghana revised its National Water Policy in 2024 under the principle of “leaving no one behind” with in part as an objective to “enable equitable access to sustainable, safely managed and affordable water for all.”²⁸³ The policy addresses the challenge of the lack of investments in “unserved and hard-to-reach communities” as well as “inadequate public sector funding in rural water services”.²⁸⁴ As such, investments and increasing government budget on community water services are listed as priorities under the policy.²⁸⁵ The policy also aims at ensuring the “active participation of women as a means of empowering them to take charge of water issues at all levels.”²⁸⁶



 ↑ *A young girl attempting to use the mechanical pump in Kukuo. She pushed on the lever for several minutes before water came out. © Amnesty International*

However, access to clean and affordable water is one of the biggest challenges in the camps. None of the camps have access to running drinking water, and residents often have to walk long distances to get it. In Kukuo, there is a borehole that was donated by the NGO Songtaba but it is difficult to get water from there during dry season. The chief priest explained the situation there: “water is a big challenge. The tanker has to come from Bimbila [about 12km away]. It is expensive. The Catholic Church came to give us a tank and Songtaba supported us with a borehole here, but it only works in the rainy season. The bed is low, and during the dry season it does not work.”²⁸⁷ During the dry season, the women who can go fetch water from the Oti River, a journey that takes about three hours back and forth, even four hours depending on their health; it requires going downhill and uphill. They have to repeat it at least twice a day to have enough water for their daily needs, including washing clothes and cooking. The difficulty to get water is a central issue echoed by all the women in the camp. Those who are physically unable to go to the river due to disabilities have to buy water from the ones who can or rely on the help of others, often their grandchildren. This is the case of Azahara who has been in Kukuo camp since 1994 and suffer from joint pains: “I’m still in the same room with my grandchild who is 16 years old. She is going to school here. She came when she was five years old to help me with my activities: washing clothes, fetching water. I taught her how to do things since

²⁸¹ Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, National Water Policy (previously cited), p. 43.

²⁸² Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, National Water Policy (previously cited), p. 32.

²⁸³ Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, National Water Policy (previously cited), p. iii.

²⁸⁴ Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, National Water Policy (previously cited), p. 33; 35.

²⁸⁵ Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, National Water Policy (previously cited), p. 33; 35.

²⁸⁶ Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, National Water Policy (previously cited), p. 37.

²⁸⁷ Interview in person with the chief priest of Kukuo, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

she was seven.”²⁸⁸ According to the local government, they occasionally have initiatives to help with access to clean water, the latest was in 2023 when they deployed a water tanker to carry water from Bimbila to the camp for about a month.²⁸⁹ The situation impacts everyone in the community in Kukuo, but accused women are particularly vulnerable due to their age and the fact that they have limited family support.

In Gambaga, the presbyterian church try to help the residents with access to water: “for the water, we used to have a pipe, but it doesn’t work anymore. We have a borehole connected to the tank. When powered, the water goes to the tank, and we fetch from it, but now it doesn’t work, it has a problem. We spent about 2,400 cedis [USD 157.64] to try to fix it; since [four months ago] it has issues. We have a tricycle to go drive and fetch water for the weakest one in the camp. We do that about twice a week. The others go fetch themselves. We give them containers and they go fetch it themselves. It’s about 3km away.”²⁹⁰ Balraba, an 84-year-old woman who arrived in the camp around 2014 explained: “there is a water problem here in the camp. Our two water sources are faulty, we go to the riverside or sometimes to people’s homes to fetch water. We sometimes share a gallon of drinking water.”²⁹¹ Samantha, a 54-year-old woman also expressed concerns about access to water: “sometimes, I get drinking water from the well too, but the well is too far.”²⁹² Women with disabilities or health conditions have to rely on support from other women and the church. This is the case of “Tamera”, a woman over 80 years old who is partially blind: “some in the camp are strong. They help fetch water, distribute it and we’ll get some of that and manage with that.”²⁹³

In Gnani camp, the situation is similar. Action Aid provided water tanks and a pipe to facilitate access to water in the camp, but both times Amnesty International visited the camp in December 2023 and May 2024, there was a technical issue with it, forcing the residents to fetch water from the river. The chief priest explained: “Action Aid supported us with tanks, but they are not in usage currently... We have a dam that doesn’t dry but there is a hill to get there and due to the age of the women, they cannot climb the hill. The women are the ones who go and fetch water.”²⁹⁴ The men accused in the camp usually get help from their wives or grandchildren for water.²⁹⁵ Women who are unable to go fetch water due to disabilities also get help from their grandchildren. This is the case of “Tia” a widow over 70 years old: “my grandchildren here with me are about 9 and 7 years old; they came four years ago. Their father told them to come here to help me fetch water.”²⁹⁶ Madoyibu, an older woman, manages to get water herself but not without difficulty: “we are suffering to get water here because the river is far away. I don’t know the distance, but it is far. I use a bucket on my head to bring the water.”²⁹⁷

Under international law, Ghanaian authorities are required to ensure availability and access, including physical access, to clean water to all sections of the population.²⁹⁸ This means that water must be available “within, or in the immediate vicinity, of each household” and within “safe physical reach”.²⁹⁹ The government must pay special attention to access to water for vulnerable people including impoverished people, people in remote areas and older women.³⁰⁰ Women in the camps live in remote areas and are particularly vulnerable due to their age, economic situation and lack of family support. The Ghanaian authorities failed to ensure sufficient and continuous availability and access to clean water for residents of the camps.

²⁸⁸ Interview in person with Azahara Yakubu, resident of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²⁸⁹ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

²⁹⁰ Interview in person with Gladys Lariba Mahama, Gambaga Outcast Home Project Coordinator, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²⁹¹ Focus group in person with 10 women, Balraba Kubawa, resident of Gambaga camp, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²⁹² Focus group in person with 10 women, Samantha Magtibi, resident of Gambaga camp, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²⁹³ Interview in person with “Tamera” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gambaga camp, 23 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

²⁹⁴ Interview in person with the chief priest of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

²⁹⁵ Focus group in person with 10 men, residents of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

²⁹⁶ Interview in person with “Tia” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gnani camp, 5 December 2023, Gnani camp.

²⁹⁷ Interview in person with Madoyibu Bayam, resident of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

²⁹⁸ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment 15 (2002): The Right to Water (Arts. 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), 20 January 2003, UN Doc. E/C.12/2002/11, para. 2.

²⁹⁹ CESCR, General Comment 15 (previously cited), para.12(c)(i).

³⁰⁰ CESCR, General Comment 15 (previously cited), para.16; UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), General Recommendation 27 on older women and protection of their human rights, 16 December 2010, Un Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/27, para. 49.



 ↑ *A group of women coming back from the river in Kuku. © Amnesty International*

5.2 ACCESS TO HEALTH

5.2.1 UNDERLYING DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

The right to health is intrinsically linked with access to food, clean water and safe housing. Indeed, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights noted that the right to health is an inclusive right that extends beyond healthcare;³⁰¹ “[it] embraces a wide range of socio-economic factors that promote conditions in which people can lead a healthy life, and extends to the underlying determinants of health, such as food and nutrition, housing, access to safe and potable water and adequate sanitation, safe and healthy working conditions, and a healthy environment.”³⁰² As such by failing to provide adequate housing, access to water and food to people in the camps, the state also puts their right to health at risk.

³⁰¹ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment 14 (2000): The right to the highest attainable standard of health (article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), 11 August 2000, UN Doc. E/C.12/2000/4, para. 11.

³⁰² CESCR, General Comment 14 (previously cited), para. 4.

5.2.2 HEALTH SERVICES

“When we go to the health centre here, we are told there are no drugs.”³⁰³

Sanra Wumbi, woman accused of witchcraft, Kukuo

Under international law, Ghana must take all the “necessary steps to the maximum of its available resources”³⁰⁴ to ensure the “full realization of everyone’s right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”³⁰⁵ This right includes the availability of health services as well as the ability to access those physically and economically.³⁰⁶ When it comes to marginalized population such as women, older people, persons with disabilities, and people living in poverty or rural areas, the state has a heightened obligation to ensure the fulfilment of this right.³⁰⁷ The state should pay particular attention to people who have more than one characteristic that makes them vulnerable, for example older women or older people with disabilities. The Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health has noted the impact of violence on the right to health and stressed the importance of taking into consideration the different layers of vulnerabilities of a person while addressing the impact of violent acts on that person: “it is about addressing violence against the person, mindful of situations of vulnerabilities, discrimination and exclusion linked to belonging to specific groups, categories or situations, and avoiding category-based responses that forget intragroup differences and intersections.”³⁰⁸ In addition, the Special Rapporteur noted that violence can be interpersonal, societal or structural and is often “rooted in intersectional forms of discrimination,” including age, sex and poverty.³⁰⁹ Structural violence in particular is rooted in part in socioeconomic inequalities which create barriers designed to marginalize sections of the society, thereby limiting their access to health.³¹⁰

Residents of Ghana are required to register with the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) to ensure affordable access to basic healthcare services.³¹¹ They have to pay contributions except if they benefit from an exemption.³¹² Persons classified as “indigent” by the Ministry of Gender, persons with specific disabilities and persons over 70 years old are in theory, according to various government policies, exempted from annual contributions and processing fees.³¹³ The local governments Amnesty International spoke to apply this exemption for people over 60 years old in Nanumba South and East Mamprusi districts.³¹⁴ In December 2022, the government launched the Free Elderly Care Policy, which guarantees people over 70 years old a waiver for the mandatory 30-day waiting period before enrolment to NHIS and an exemption from premium and processing fees payment.³¹⁵ NHIS is integrated with the LEAP programme so that persons benefiting from LEAP do not have to pay for NHIS.³¹⁶ The national insurance is supposed to cover over 95% of diseases affecting people in Ghana, but there is a limited list of drugs covered under the insurance.³¹⁷ In addition to free medical care in specialized mental health hospitals, the government announced that NHIS

³⁰³ Focus group in person with five women, residents of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

³⁰⁴ CESCR General Comment 14 (previously cited), para. 47.

³⁰⁵ CESCR General Comment 14 (previously cited), para. 49.

³⁰⁶ CESCR, General Comment 14 (previously cited), para. 12.

³⁰⁷ CESCR, General Comment 14 (previously cited), paras 12, 25, 26, 37, 43(a), 43(f), 52, 62, 65.

³⁰⁸ UN Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health, Report: Violence and its Impact on the Right to Health, 14 April 2022, UN Doc. A/HRC/50/28, para. 5.

³⁰⁹ UN Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health, Violence and its Impact on the Right to Health (previously cited), para. 4.

³¹⁰ UN Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health, Violence and its Impact on the Right to Health (previously cited), para. 70.

³¹¹ Ghana, National Health Insurance Act, 2012 (ACT 852), 2012, <https://www.nhis.gov.gh/files/ACT852.pdf>, sections 26-27 (as amended by National Health Insurance (Amendment) Act, 2018).

³¹² National Health Insurance Act (previously cited), sections 28-29; Ministry of Health, National Health Insurance Policy Framework for Ghana, August 2004, <https://www.moh.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/National-Health-Insurance-Policy-framework.pdf>, p.1.

³¹³ National Health Insurance Authority, “Home-Membership”, <https://www.nhis.gov.gh/membership>; National Health Insurance Act (previously cited).

³¹⁴ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi; Interview in person with East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, 25 April 2024, Gambaga.

³¹⁵ National Health Insurance Authority, “NHIA Free Elderly Care Policy impactful”, 18 January 2023, <https://www.nhis.gov.gh/News/nhia-free-elderly-care-policy-impactful--5471>.

³¹⁶ National Health Insurance Authority, “Free NHIS for LEAP Beneficiaries Launched”, 8 December 2016, <https://www.nhis.gov.gh/News/free-nhis-for-leap-beneficiaries-launched-4092>; Songtaba and Ghana Somubi Dwumadie, “Prevalence of Depression, Quality of Life and Gender Dynamics of Women Accused of Witchcraft in Northern and North East Regions of Ghana”, February 2022, p. 41.

³¹⁷ National Health Insurance Authority, “Home-Benefits Package”, <https://www.nhis.gov.gh/benefits>.

subscribers would benefit from free care in general hospitals for depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder and schizophrenia as of November 2024.³¹⁸ Residents have to pay for services and drugs not covered by the insurance scheme, such as cancer treatments for adults (except cervical and breast cancer) as well as appliances and prosthesis such as hearing and optical aids. The insurance card must be renewed every year.

Most of the women Amnesty International interviewed in all the camps were registered under NHIS but stated that it was not enough.

In Kukuo, the women accused of witchcraft live amongst other residents who face similar issues of access to healthcare; however, as their family ties have been severed, they often must rely on others in the community to assist them with medical bills and transportation to the hospital if needed. The local government works with focal points in Kukuo to ensure the women in the camp are registered: “for the witch camp, we work with agents. After the registration, we take them through all the benefits they can get. When it expires, they need to tell the focal person, and that focal person can bring them straight to the Ghana Health Insurance Office. When they don't tell them, we wouldn't know.”³¹⁹ When the women in the camp get sick, they go to the health centre in Kukuo and if needed to the hospital in Bimbila, a 20-minute drive away.³²⁰ Despite having health insurance, they have difficulties finding affordable drugs, either because the necessary drugs are not available in the local clinic or they are not covered under the insurance. There are occasional medical screenings in the camp spearheaded by NGOs, but they are not systematic; the local government explained: “some time ago we partnered with Songtaba to do the screenings in the camp. Otherwise, they [the women] are the ones going for healthcare at the hospital. We go to them only when there is a partnership with NGOs. The last time we did a screening was this year [2024]. I don't know the exact month. We screened everyone in the camp, even children. The team is multidisciplinary... Last time we did not have a psychologist or any mental health officer in the delegation.”³²¹ Azahara, a woman who has been living in Kukuo several decades confirmed that doctors occasionally come directly to the camp to do health screenings: “doctors visit us for screening. They come after one year or so. They are not regular. They tell me that I don't have enough blood. They give me medication for free. I don't know if they are doctors from NGOs or from the government. Sometimes I'm sick. I have chest pains and pain in my joints.”³²² However, another woman who has been in the camp for 14 years said that she has only seen doctors in the camp once.³²³

³¹⁸ National Health Insurance Authority, “NHIS Benefit Package to be Expanded to Include Mental Health Treatment”, 14 February 2024, <https://nhis.gov.gh/News/nhis-benefit-package-to-be-expanded-to-include-mental-health-treatment--5561>; Joy Online, “NHIS expands coverage to include mental health services starting Nov.1”, 15 October 2024, <https://www.myjoyonline.com/nhis-expands-coverage-to-include-mental-health-services-starting-nov-1/#>; Ghana News Agency, “NHIS to cover four mental health diseases”, 15 October 2024, <https://gna.org.gh/2024/10/nhis-to-cover-four-mental-health-diseases/>.

³¹⁹ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

³²⁰ Focus group in person with six women, residents of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp; focus group in person with five women, residents of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

³²¹ Interview in person with Nanumba South District Assembly, 29 April 2024, Wulensi.

³²² Interview in person with Azahara Yakubu, resident of Kukuo camp, 28 April 2024, Kukuo camp.

³²³ Interview in person with Mahama Ajishetu, resident of Kukuo camp, 27 April 2024, Kukuo camp.



WOMEN WITH SERIOUS HEALTH CONDITIONS IN KUKUO

The national health insurance coverage is not enough for women who are older or have serious health conditions. This is the case of Zina a woman over 70 years old who got health insurance when she was in the camp. She told Amnesty International that after hurting her knee, she could not receive adequate help from the local clinic and had to get help to pay for the operation: “I hurt my knee. I only went to the

hospital once in the past three years. The doctors drew out fluid with a needle, but it did not help me. It became big... For the knee operation I had, they took a lot, 1300 cedis [USD 84] when I got operated on. My brother’s son paid for it. I have health insurance, but they [don’t pay for everything]. It was a private hospital, so it doesn’t work with the health insurance; it was private doctors.”³²⁴

Mariama, a woman over 80 years old who is unable to walk relies on her grandson for help to call the doctors when needed and pay hospital bills: “I used to go to the hospital when I was strong, every month. Now that I cannot move, I have stopped going. I used to have a stomach ulcer... I had medicine from the hospital. I recovered. Sometimes my legs get swollen, the whole [left] leg get sore. One doctor came in, dressed my particular leg. I would have been dead if it were not for him... When I got to the hospital, I was asked to pay for [some] drugs. My grandson and other relatives would pay for it. The other [drugs] are free because of health insurance... Since I fell, I could not stand up. They [doctors] came here three times. They don’t come if we don’t invite them. The ones coming for routine visits, I don’t see them. Maybe they don’t know that I am here; when all my family is farming, I am here with my doors closed.”³²⁵

In Gambaga, according to the local government, a social welfare officer helps register new arrivals into the NHIS. The social welfare officer brings new residents to the municipal office to help them register and also collects expired insurance cards in the camp to renew them every year.³²⁶ They work in coordination with the presbyterian church Go Home Project in order to register new arrivals and renew health insurance. The manager of the project informs them of new arrivals and cover the costs of those who are not insured yet. They explained: “if a new person is not registered yet and is sick, the project will take care of it... It takes about one month for new registrations to receive the card and have the benefits’ rights. The renewal is done on the very day.”³²⁷ According to the local government, people in the camp don’t pay anything to renew their cards regardless of age and 95 people including children were registered for health insurance in Gambaga as of April 2024.³²⁸ They clarified that treatment and drugs for the most common illnesses in the camp, malaria and fever, are covered by health insurance as are most outpatient cases.³²⁹ However, when someone has to be admitted in the hospital, not all costs are covered by the insurance.³³⁰ In addition, when the drugs are covered by the insurance, the hospital give it to the patients, but when doctors write a prescription, patients have to cover the costs at their own expenses. Since some conditions and drugs are not covered by the insurance, people in the camp have to rely on the Go Home Project to help them with the bills.³³¹ The manager of the project in the camp confirmed that people on LEAP have their health insurance renewed at no additional cost, but that the health insurance coverage being insufficient, the project has to help camp residents cover the cost of hospital bills and drugs not covered under NHIS.³³²

³²⁴ Interview in person with Zina Woumbi, resident of Kuku camp, 27 April 2024, Kuku camp.

³²⁵ Interview in person with Mariama Wambie, resident of Kuku camp, 27 April 2024, Kuku camp.

³²⁶ Interview in person with East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, 25 April 2024, Gambaga.

³²⁷ Interview in person with East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, 25 April 2024, Gambaga.

³²⁸ Interview in person with East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, 25 April 2024, Gambaga.

³²⁹ Interview in person with East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, 25 April 2024, Gambaga.

³³⁰ Interview in person with East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, 25 April 2024, Gambaga.

³³¹ Interview in person with East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly, 25 April 2024, Gambaga.

³³² Interview in person with Gladys Lariba Mahama, Gambaga Outcast Home Project Coordinator, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.



WOMEN WITH SERIOUS HEALTH CONDITIONS IN GAMBAGA

Like in Kukuo camp, women who have a serious health condition are particularly vulnerable because they must rely on the help of others to pay medical bills or pay them themselves. This is the case of “Tamera”, a woman over 80 years old who started having issues with her right eye before she arrived in the camp around 2018 but whose condition worsened in the camp. When she spoke to Amnesty International in April 2024, she could only see from one eye while the other one was practically shut; she explained: “before, my eye was not worrying me so much. Now it does. It got so serious since last year [2023]. I have gone to the hospital a lot, about four times; someone paid for me the first time. The other times I paid for myself. I sell the little food I get to get the money... They gave me drops and ointment at the hospital. I cannot see in my right eye anymore. I started not being able to see about a year ago. I cannot see at all. For the headaches, it comes and goes, but the drug helps.”³³³ Zumera a woman over 60 years old who lives alone in the camp also must rely on support from others: “I’m battling with my health issues. I can’t work here, not even fetch water. I have diabetes and I have problems with my knees... I went to the [public] hospital because they have insisted that I don’t let my medication finish. I’m going to the Baptism Medical Centre in Nalerigu every 2 months [about 8km away]... Sometimes I pay the medical fees from the gifts I receive from people.”³³⁴

In Gnani camp where there are hundreds of residents, not all residents have health insurance. According to residents Amnesty International spoke to, local officials occasionally come to register residents into NHIS but it is unclear at which frequency and there is no NGO helping to track arrivals and registration into NHIS. Even those who have health insurance told Amnesty International it is not enough to cover hospital bills and medications when they are very sick. Tidal, a woman who has been living in Gnani camp since around 2012, said she was registered for health insurance in the camp. Since arriving in the camp, she received free check-ups from doctors who came directly to the camp about four or five times, but now that her health has deteriorated, she cannot pay for the medication: “my waist is hurting. I cannot stand up... I have some rashes on my body. I have high blood pressure. There are doctors, but when I go there and he writes me a prescription, I cannot buy it; so, I take the prescription and leave it at home.”³³⁵

According to Gushegu Municipal Assembly, registration and renewal for insurance for people in Kpatinga camp is free, and they are all enrolled under NHIS.³³⁶ Moreover, treatments for the most common illnesses in the camp (malaria, joint pains, headaches, piles) are covered under NHIS.³³⁷

While the NHIS covers a lot of costs for basic health issues, it is not enough to cover hospital bills and medication for people in the camps as they are for the most part older people living in difficult conditions, which makes them at risk of developing health conditions. In addition, not all of them are registered for NHIS despite being part of a vulnerable section of the population as defined under NHIS.

Even though the living conditions in the camps are difficult, many women Amnesty International spoke to prefer staying there for lack of a better alternative due to their advanced age or lack of family. As such, the government should ameliorate the conditions in the camps for those who cannot leave. While there have been initiatives to increase access to medical services in the camps, these are sporadic and often spearheaded by NGOs. In 2024, CHRAJ conducted national health insurance registration for the whole community in Kukuo.³³⁸ The NGO Crossroad International in partnership with CHRAJ conducted medical screenings in all the camps in 2023. The same year, CHRAJ conducted psychological screenings in the camps.³³⁹ Songtaba also occasionally conduct medical screenings in the camps including in 2013 in Kukuo, in 2020 in Kpatinga, in 2024 in Gambaga and a psychological screening in Gnani in 2023.³⁴⁰ States have an obligation to provide enough health insurance and health facilities to those who cannot afford it otherwise.³⁴¹ Under international law, civil society also has a responsibility to assist with the fulfilment of the right to

³³³ Interview in person with “Tamera” (name changed for security reasons), resident of Gambaga camp, 23 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

³³⁴ Interview in person with Zumera Abubakar, resident of Gambaga camp, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

³³⁵ Interview in person with Tidal Bisan, resident of Gnani camp, 1 May 2024, Gnani camp.

³³⁶ Social Welfare Officer at Gushegu Municipal Assembly, email to Amnesty International, 28 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

³³⁷ Social Welfare Officer at Gushegu Municipal Assembly, email to Amnesty International, 28 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

³³⁸ Interview in person with CHRAJ, 3 May 2024, Accra.

³³⁹ Interview in person with CHRAJ, 3 May 2024, Accra.

³⁴⁰ Representative from Songtaba, email to Amnesty International and a representative of Action Aid Ghana, 17 January 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

³⁴¹ CESCR, General Comment 14 (previously cited), para. 19.

health, but the state is “ultimately accountable for compliance with it.”³⁴² In this instance, according to information Amnesty International was able to gather, the state has failed to provide enough access to healthcare to persons in the camps who are particularly vulnerable, leaving them dependent on the support of NGOs or other individuals, which sometimes is insufficient to guarantee their access to quality healthcare.



MENTAL HEALTH IN THE CAMPS

According to a study conducted by Songtaba in 2022 with the support of Ghana Somubi Dwumadie, a disability program focused on mental health, a public health specialist and BasicNeeds-Ghana, a mental health and development advocacy organization, residents across Gambaga, Kpatinga and Gnani camps reported depression as well as a low or extremely low quality of life.³⁴³ The study revealed that most participants had to rely on medication daily due to chronic pain, but medication was not always available.³⁴⁴ It also showed that the participants had a negative perception of their physical appearance and did not enjoy life.³⁴⁵ The study attributed the prevalence of depression to the trauma of the accusation followed by the marginalisation, isolation and living conditions in the camps.³⁴⁶

When Amnesty International visited the camps, some women expressed emotional distress. Amina told the organization: “when I arrived in the camp, I was not able to eat. My heart was in trouble, and I lost appetite. I was just thinking how I left my house and my children. Not being able to see my children and my grandchildren was making me sick.”³⁴⁷ “Aissatou” said that the ritual she was forced to undergo when entering Kpatinga camp left her unsettled: “I was not happy with the ritual and drinking the concoction just because I was accused; I am not a witch. I cried for 3 days.”³⁴⁸ Lari who is in Gambaga camp told Amnesty International that she even contemplated suicide: “When I came here, I was thinking of committing suicide, but the other women talked to me and made me change my mind. I wanted to commit suicide because the accusation was too much. It was so painful to me. They were saying that I was responsible for the death of the son I loved so much.”³⁴⁹

³⁴² CESCR, General Comment 14 (previously cited), para. 42.

³⁴³ Songtaba and Ghana Somubi Dwumadie, “Prevalence of Depression, Quality of Life and Gender Dynamics of Women Accused of Witchcraft in Northern and North East Regions of Ghana”, February 2022.

³⁴⁴ Lamnatu Adam, Abdul Kasiru Shani, Peter Badimak Yaro, Lyla Adwan-Kamara and Philip Teg-Nefaaah Tabong, “Depression and Quality of Life of People Accused of Witchcraft and Living in Alleged Witches’ Camps in Northern Ghana”, 14 February 2023, *Health & Social Care in the Community*, Volume 2023, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1155/2023/6830762>, p. 4.

³⁴⁵ Lamnatu Adam and others, “Depression and Quality of Life of People Accused of Witchcraft and Living in Alleged Witches’ Camps in Northern Ghana” (previously cited), p.4.

³⁴⁶ Lamnatu Adam and others, “Depression and Quality of Life of People Accused of Witchcraft and Living in Alleged Witches’ Camps in Northern Ghana” (previously cited), p.5.

³⁴⁷ Interview in person with Amina Tia, resident of Gambaga camp, 24 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

³⁴⁸ Interview in person with “Aissatou” (named changed for security reasons), resident of Kpatinga camp, 4 December 2023, Kpatinga camp.

³⁴⁹ Interview in person with Lari Yamdaula, resident of Gambaga camp, 23 April 2024, Gambaga camp.

6. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

6.1 INTERNATIONAL LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

Ghana ratified all of the main international human rights treaties including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1986, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 2000. Moreover, Ghana ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter) in 1989 and its protocol on the rights of women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) in 2007.

6.1.1 DIGNITY: A KEY PRINCIPLE

Dignity is a key principle running throughout the international human rights framework. The first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."³⁵⁰ The importance of the respect for human dignity is reiterated in the preambles of both the ICCPR and the ICESCR: "considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world, [r]ecognizing that these rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person".³⁵¹ This right is also stipulated in article 5 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (The Banjul Charter).³⁵² The Maputo Protocol details the right of dignity as it pertains to women and states' obligations in that regard: "1. Every woman shall have the right to dignity inherent in a human being and to the recognition and protection of her human and legal rights. 2. Every woman shall have the right to respect as a person and to the free development of her personality. 3. States Parties shall adopt and implement appropriate measures to prohibit any exploitation or degradation of women. 4. States Parties shall adopt and implement appropriate measures to ensure the protection of every woman's right to respect for her dignity and protection of women from all forms of violence, particularly sexual and verbal violence."³⁵³ This right is stressed for older women who are particularly at risk as state parties are called to "ensure the right of elderly women to freedom from violence, including sexual abuse, discrimination based on age and the right to be treated with dignity."³⁵⁴

6.1.2 RIGHT TO LIFE AND SECURITY OF PERSON

The right to life and security of the person is embodied in article 6 of the ICCPR, which states: "every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life."³⁵⁵ The UN Human Rights Committee further specified that states have the duty to put in place a legal framework to protect individuals from foreseeable threats by other people, especially for individuals in vulnerable conditions.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁰ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), article 1.

³⁵¹ ICCPR, preamble; ICESCR, preamble.

³⁵² African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (The Banjul Charter), article 5.

³⁵³ Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), Article 3.

³⁵⁴ Maputo Protocol, Article 22 (b).

³⁵⁵ ICCPR, Article 6 (1).

³⁵⁶ HCR, General Comment 36 (previously cited), para. 18.



THE RIGHT TO LIFE AS DEFINED BY THE UNITED NATIONS

“States parties must establish a legal framework to ensure the full enjoyment of the right to life by all individuals as may be necessary to give effect to the right to life. The duty to protect the right to life by law also includes an obligation for states parties to adopt any appropriate laws or other measures in order to protect life from all reasonably foreseeable threats, including from threats emanating from

private persons and entities.”³⁵⁷

“The duty to protect by law the right to life also requires states parties to organize all state organs and governance structures through which public authority is exercised in a manner consistent with the need to respect and ensure the right to life, including establishing by law adequate institutions and procedures for preventing deprivation of life, investigating and prosecuting potential cases of unlawful deprivation of life, meting out punishment and providing full reparation.”³⁵⁸

“States parties must enact a protective legal framework that includes effective criminal prohibitions on all manifestations of violence or incitement to violence that are likely to result in deprivation of life, such as intentional and negligent homicide... lynching...”³⁵⁹

“The duty to protect the right to life requires states parties to take special measures of protection towards persons in vulnerable situations whose lives have been placed at particular risk because of specific threats or pre-existing patterns of violence. Such persons include... victims of domestic and gender-based violence and human trafficking. They may also include... persons with albinism, alleged witches...”³⁶⁰

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women also addressed the need for states to pass legislation to protect the right to life and security of the person when it comes to older women: “states parties have an obligation to draft legislation recognizing and prohibiting violence, including domestic, sexual violence and violence in institutional settings, against older women, including those with disabilities. States parties have an obligation to investigate, prosecute and punish all acts of violence against older women, including those committed as a result of traditional practices and beliefs.”³⁶¹

The right to life, integrity and security of the person is also highlighted in the Banjul Charter: “[h]uman beings are inviolable. Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right”.³⁶² The state’s responsibility to guarantee the right to life under the charter includes not only investigations and prosecutions when there are violations, but also preventive measures including training of police officers and “continuous awareness-raising campaigns to demystify the superstitions and harmful beliefs.”³⁶³ Moreover, “[t]hese responsibilities are heightened when an observable pattern has been overlooked or ignored, such as is often the case with respect to mob-justice, gender-based violence, femicide, or harmful practices. States must take all appropriate measures effectively to respond to, prevent and eliminate such patterns or practices.”³⁶⁴

The Maputo Protocol specifies that right as it relates to women: “[e]very woman shall be entitled to respect for her life and the integrity and security of her person. All forms of exploitation, cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment and treatment shall be prohibited.”³⁶⁵ Under the Maputo Protocol, states are required to put in place “appropriate and effective measures” to protect the right to life of women, including to:³⁶⁶

- “enact and enforce laws to prohibit all forms of violence against women including unwanted or forced sex whether the violence takes place in private or public;”³⁶⁷

³⁵⁷ HCR, General Comment 36 (previously cited), para. 18.

³⁵⁸ HCR, General Comment 36 (previously cited), para. 19.

³⁵⁹ HCR, General Comment 36 (previously cited), para. 20.

³⁶⁰ HCR, General Comment 36 (previously cited), para. 23.

³⁶¹ CEDAW, General Recommendation 27 (previously cited), para. 37.

³⁶² The Banjul Charter, Article 4.

³⁶³ African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights (African Court), Centre for Human Rights and Others v. United Republic of Tanzania, Application 019/2018, 5 February 2025, <https://www.african-court.org/cpmt/storage/app/uploads/public/67a/60b/d08/67a60bd08d5ae236146763.pdf>, paras. 184, 175.

³⁶⁴ African Court, Centre for Human Rights and Others v. United Republic of Tanzania (previously cited), para. 175.

³⁶⁵ Maputo Protocol, Article 4.

³⁶⁶ Maputo Protocol, Article 4(2).

³⁶⁷ Maputo Protocol, Article 4(2)(a).

- “adopt such other legislative, administrative, social and economic measures as may be necessary to ensure the prevention, punishment and eradication of all forms of violence against women;”³⁶⁸
- “identify the causes and consequences of violence against women and take appropriate measures to prevent and eliminate such violence;”³⁶⁹
- “actively promote peace education through curricula and social communication in order to eradicate elements in traditional and cultural beliefs, practices and stereotypes which legitimise and exacerbate the persistence and tolerance of violence against women;”³⁷⁰
- “punish the perpetrators of violence against women and implement programmes for the rehabilitation of women victims;”³⁷¹
- “establish mechanisms and accessible services for effective information, rehabilitation and reparation for victims of violence against women;”³⁷²
- “provide adequate budgetary and other resources for the implementation and monitoring of actions aimed at preventing and eradicating violence against women;”³⁷³

6.1.3 RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING

As a state party to the ICESCR, Ghana must respect, protect and fulfil the rights enshrined in the treaty. Ghana must undertake to “take steps, individually and through international assistance and co-operation... to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the ... Covenant by all appropriate means”.³⁷⁴ Even in times of resources constraints “the vulnerable members of society can and indeed must be protected by the adoption of relatively low-cost targeted programmes”.³⁷⁵ Under the ICESCR, states “recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.”³⁷⁶ The right to adequate food implies the continuous availability and accessibility of adequate food. “Availability refers to the possibilities either for feeding oneself directly from productive land or other natural resources, or for well-functioning distribution, processing and market systems”, while accessibility implies economic and physical accessibility.³⁷⁷ The obligation of Ghana to fulfil this right means that the state should take proactive steps “to strengthen people’s access to and utilization of resources and means to ensure their livelihood, including food security.”³⁷⁸ In addition, “whenever an individual or group is unable, for reasons beyond their control, to enjoy the right to adequate food by the means at their disposal, states have the obligation to fulfil (provide) that right directly.”³⁷⁹ Furthermore in its strategy to fulfil this right, states must prevent discrimination in access to food or resources for it, including by guaranteeing “full and equal access to economic resources, particularly for women, including the right to inheritance and the ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and appropriate technology...”.³⁸⁰ As such, older people should be able to access food as well as impoverished people without any kind of discrimination.³⁸¹ “Socially vulnerable groups such as landless persons and other particularly impoverished segments of the population may need attention through special programmes.”³⁸²

Moreover, the United Nations has recognized the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as essential for the full enjoyment of all human rights,³⁸³ including for an adequate standard of living.³⁸⁴ This right implies “sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and

³⁶⁸ Maputo Protocol, Article 4(2)(b).

³⁶⁹ Maputo Protocol, Article 4(2)(c).

³⁷⁰ Maputo Protocol, Article 4(2)(d).

³⁷¹ Maputo Protocol, Article 4(2)(e).

³⁷² Maputo Protocol, Article 4(2)(f).

³⁷³ Maputo Protocol, Article 4(2)(i).

³⁷⁴ ICESCR, Article 2 (1).

³⁷⁵ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment 3: The Nature of States Parties’ Obligations (Art. 2, Para. 1, of the Covenant), 14 December 1990, UN Doc. E/1991/23, para.12; CESCR, General Comment 12 (previously cited), para. 28.

³⁷⁶ ICESCR, article 11(1).

³⁷⁷ CESCR, General Comment 12 (previously cited), paras 12-13.

³⁷⁸ CESCR, General Comment 12 (previously cited), para 15.

³⁷⁹ CESCR, General Comment 12 (previously cited), para 15.

³⁸⁰ CESCR, General Comment 12 (previously cited), para 26.

³⁸¹ CESCR, General Comment 12 (previously cited), para 13.

³⁸² CESCR, General Comment 12 (previously cited), para 13.

³⁸³ UN General Assembly (UNGA), Resolution 64/292: The Human Rights to Water and Sanitation, adopted on 28 July 2010, UN Doc. A/RES/64/292.

³⁸⁴ CESCR, General Comment 15 (previously cited), para. 3.

domestic uses.”³⁸⁵ As such, the right to water requires availability, quality and accessibility to clean water. Concerning the latter, water “must be accessible within, or in the immediate vicinity, of each household”, that is within “safe physical reach for all sections of the population.”³⁸⁶ Specific attention should be provided to marginalized groups including women and rural areas to ensure their access to water.³⁸⁷ With regards to older women, states should make sure they have access to affordable water.³⁸⁸

Although the Banjul Charter does not include a specific right to food, the African Commission has recognized the right to food into the Charter provisions guaranteeing the right to health and the right to life (Article 4).³⁸⁹ The Maputo Protocol requires states to ensure the right to “nutritious and adequate” food for women, including “access to clean drinking water, sources of domestic fuel, land, and the means of producing nutritious food.”³⁹⁰

Regarding the right to adequate housing, UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has highlighted that it should be interpreted broadly, and it should be understood as the right to live in a place that ensures safety, peace, and dignity.³⁹¹ According to the Committee adequate housing requires legal security of tenure; availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; affordability; habitability; accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy.³⁹² The right to adequate housing applies to everyone and the enjoyment of this right must not be subject to any form of discrimination. States undertake to guarantee that the rights enunciated in the ICESCR, “will be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”³⁹³ According to the Committee, the nature of discrimination varies according to context and evolves over time. Therefore, “a flexible approach to the ground of “other status” is thus needed in order to capture other forms of differential treatment that cannot be reasonably and objectively justified.”³⁹⁴

6.1.4 RIGHT TO HEALTH

Article 12 of the ICESCR recognizes the right for everyone to enjoy the “highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”³⁹⁵ Article 16 of the Banjul Charter similarly recognizes the “right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical and mental health.”³⁹⁶ The right to health extends to underlying determinants of health - factors that can have an impact on health including food, access to water, and housing.³⁹⁷ Availability and accessibility, including economic accessibility, are essential elements in ensuring the right to health.³⁹⁸ States have an obligation to provide enough health insurance and health facilities to those who cannot afford it otherwise.³⁹⁹ The right to health includes appropriate mental health treatment and care.⁴⁰⁰ With regards to risks to women’s health, states should put in place a “comprehensive national strategy for promoting women’s right to health throughout their life span.” Moreover, for older people, the right to health requires “an integrated approach, combining elements of preventive, curative and rehabilitative health treatment. Such measures should be based on periodical check-ups for both sexes; physical as well as psychological rehabilitative measures aimed at maintaining the functionality and autonomy of older persons...”⁴⁰¹ States should put in place a thorough health-care policy to ensure “affordable and accessible health care to all older women through, where appropriate, the elimination of user fees.”⁴⁰²

Violations of the right to health include acts of omission, that is “the failure to take appropriate steps towards the full realization of everyone’s right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and

³⁸⁵ CESCR, General Comment 15 (previously cited), para. 2.

³⁸⁶ CESCR, General Comment 15 (previously cited), para 12(c)(i).

³⁸⁷ CESCR, General Comment 15 (previously cited), para 16.

³⁸⁸ CEDAW, General Recommendation 27 (previously cited), para. 49.

³⁸⁹ African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR), *The Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (SERAC) and the Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) v. Nigeria*, Communication 155/96, 27 October 2001.

³⁹⁰ Maputo Protocol, Article XV.

³⁹¹ CESCR, General Comment 4 (previously cited), para. 7.

³⁹² CESCR, General Comment 4 (previously cited), para. 8.

³⁹³ ICESCR, Article 2.

³⁹⁴ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment 20: Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights (art. 2, para. 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), 2 July 2009, UN Doc. E/C.12/GC/20, para. 27.

³⁹⁵ ICESCR, Article 12.

³⁹⁶ The Banjul Charter, Article 16.

³⁹⁷ CESCR, General Comment 14 (previously cited), para. 4.

³⁹⁸ CESCR, General Comment 14 (previously cited), para. 12.

³⁹⁹ CESCR, General Comment 14 (previously cited), para. 19.

⁴⁰⁰ CESCR, General Comment 14 (previously cited), para. 17.

⁴⁰¹ CESCR, General Comment 14 (previously cited), para. 25.

⁴⁰² CEDAW, General Recommendation 27 (previously cited), para. 45.

mental health.”⁴⁰³ States’ violation of their obligation to protect the right to health includes “the failure to protect women against violence or to prosecute perpetrators”, while the failure to provide sufficient resources constitute a violation of states’ obligation to fulfil the right to health.⁴⁰⁴

The Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health noted that structural violence (“being allowed to die” as opposed to “being killed”) is an obstacle to the realization of the right to health: “structural violence is a subtle and quite often invisible form of violence normalized through laws, policies and the institutionalization of certain practices that have their roots in legacies of colonialism, racism, apartheid and structural socioeconomic inequalities. It creates unjust barriers that are socially and systemically designed to marginalize individuals and populations across the race, class and gender divide, thereby limiting the realization of the right to health for many populations. Structural violence with deep roots in patriarchal, hegemonic, and colonial definitions of society and social order is deeply entwined with sexual and gender-based violence and the denial of survivors’ access to health care and medical services.”⁴⁰⁵

6.1.5 RIGHT TO NON-DISCRIMINATION

The right to non-discrimination is contained in all main treaties Ghana is a party to. The ICCPR recognizes the “equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights”⁴⁰⁶ and that “all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as...sex”.⁴⁰⁷ Under the ICESCR, states parties also undertake to guarantee socio-economic rights without any discrimination.⁴⁰⁸ Additionally, under CEDAW, states agree to set up a policy to eliminate discrimination against women including by taking “all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise” and by taking “all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women”.⁴⁰⁹ In addition, harmful practices are a violation of women’s rights and states must take all appropriate measures to “modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women”.⁴¹⁰ The Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women defined harmful practices as practices which constitute a denial of the dignity and/or the integrity of an individual, result in physical, psychological, economic and social harm and/or violence and limit women’s and girl’s capacity to participate fully in society.”⁴¹¹ The Committee recognizes accusations of witchcraft as harmful practices.⁴¹² States are under the obligation to prevent harmful practices, protect women from them including by passing legislation prohibiting them, investigate violations, punish perpetrators and provide reparations for the victims.⁴¹³ In addition, states shall take special consideration to the difficulties faced by women living in rural areas, and ensure they are not discriminated against when it comes to, among other things, adequate living conditions.⁴¹⁴

When it comes to older women, the Committee noted that “many older women face neglect as they are no longer considered useful in their productive and reproductive roles, and are seen as a burden on their families. Widowhood and divorce further exacerbate discrimination, while lack of or limited access to health-care services for diseases and conditions, such as diabetes, cancer, hypertension, heart disease, cataract,

⁴⁰³ CESCR, General Comment 14 (previously cited), para. 49.

⁴⁰⁴ CESCR, General Comment 14 (previously cited), paras 51-52.

⁴⁰⁵ UN Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health, Violence and its Impact on the Right to Health (previously cited), para. 70.

⁴⁰⁶ ICCPR, Article 3.

⁴⁰⁷ ICCPR, Article 26.

⁴⁰⁸ ICESCR, Article 2.2.

⁴⁰⁹ CEDAW, Articles 2(e)-(f).

⁴¹⁰ CEDAW, Article 5.

⁴¹¹ CEDAW, Harmful Practices as Gender-based Violence against Women and Girls: CEDAW Convention, General Recommendations (Nos 12, 14, 19, 31 and 35) and Practice of the Committee with Recommendations and Guidance to State Parties to the Convention, 1 September 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/harmful-practices-gender-based-violence-against-women-and-girls-cedaw>, para. 1.

⁴¹² CEDAW, Harmful Practices as Gender-based Violence against Women and Girls: CEDAW Convention, General Recommendations (Nos 12, 14, 19, 31 and 35) and Practice of the Committee with Recommendations and Guidance to State Parties to the Convention (previously cited), para. 3.

⁴¹³ CEDAW, Harmful Practices as Gender-based Violence against Women and Girls: CEDAW Convention, General Recommendations (Nos 12, 14, 19, 31 and 35) and Practice of the Committee with Recommendations and Guidance to State Parties to the Convention (previously cited).

⁴¹⁴ CEDAW, Article 14(2).

osteoporosis and Alzheimer, prevent older women from enjoying their full human rights.”⁴¹⁵ As such, the Committee specified that “states parties have an obligation to eliminate negative stereotyping and modify social and cultural patterns of conduct that are prejudicial and harmful to older women, so as to reduce the physical, sexual, psychological, verbal and economic abuse that older women, including those with disabilities, experience based on negative stereotyping and cultural practices.”⁴¹⁶ Indeed, “gender stereotyping, traditional and customary practices can have harmful impacts on all areas of the lives of older women, in particular those with disabilities, including family relationships, community roles, portrayal in the media, employers’ attitudes, health care and other service providers, and can result in physical violence as well as psychological, verbal and financial abuse.”⁴¹⁷ In addition, “states parties have an obligation to investigate, prosecute and punish all acts of violence against older women, including those committed as a result of traditional practices and beliefs.”⁴¹⁸

Moreover, the OHCHR noted that states should consider the “multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination” such age, gender and disability which create a higher risk for some individuals to be accused of witchcraft.⁴¹⁹

The Maputo Protocol also requires state parties to combat discrimination against women in part by addressing harmful cultural and traditional practices, as well as protecting women at risk of being subjected to it.⁴²⁰ As such, women should have equal access to justice⁴²¹ and be provided with appropriate remedies when their rights are violated.⁴²² The Maputo Protocol recognizes the right of women to “live in a positive cultural context and to participate at all levels in the determination of cultural policies”,⁴²³ as well as the right to widows not to be subjected to “inhuman, humiliating or degrading treatment”.⁴²⁴ Under the protocol, states are to provide special protection to older women by taking measures to ensure their “physical, economic and social needs” and their freedom from violence.⁴²⁵

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa came into force on 4 November 2024. Under the protocol, which Ghana signed in 2017, but is yet to ratify, states have the obligation to “adopt legislative or other measures”⁴²⁶ to eliminate discrimination against older persons,⁴²⁷ guarantee their access to justice and health services,⁴²⁸ provide them with social protection,⁴²⁹ protect them from abuses and harmful traditional practices,⁴³⁰ as well as to ensure additional protection to older women from violence, discrimination and land grabbing.⁴³¹

Furthermore, the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights found that for a state to properly address the roots of “stigma and discrimination”, it had to “undertake intensive long-term awareness-raising campaigns with multiple stakeholders.”⁴³²

Despite the risks of violence and abuse they face to their human rights around the world, which Amnesty International has documented extensively,⁴³³ there is currently no international convention dedicated to protecting the rights of older people from discrimination. The unique experience and particular vulnerabilities of older people are not addressed in the current international legal framework and states do not have positive obligations to combat discrimination based on age and negative stereotypes attributed to older people.

⁴¹⁵ CEDAW, General Recommendation 27 (previously cited), para. 14.

⁴¹⁶ CEDAW General Recommendation 27 (previously cited), para 36.

⁴¹⁷ CEDAW General Recommendation 27 (previously cited), para. 16.

⁴¹⁸ CEDAW, General Recommendation 27 (previously cited), para. 37.

⁴¹⁹ OHCHR, Study on the Situation of the Violations and Abuses of Human Rights Rooted in Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks, As Well As Stigmatization (previously cited), para. 60.

⁴²⁰ Maputo Protocol, Articles II; V.

⁴²¹ Maputo Protocol, Article 8.

⁴²² Maputo Protocol, Article 25.

⁴²³ Maputo Protocol, Article 17(1).

⁴²⁴ Maputo Protocol, Article 20(a).

⁴²⁵ Maputo Protocol, Article 22.

⁴²⁶ Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa (The Protocol on Older Persons), 31 January 2016, Article 2.

⁴²⁷ The Protocol on Older Persons, Article 3.

⁴²⁸ The Protocol on Older Persons, Articles 4; 15.

⁴²⁹ The Protocol on Older Persons, Article 7.

⁴³⁰ The Protocol on Older Persons, Article 8.

⁴³¹ The Protocol on Older Persons, Article 9.

⁴³² African Court, *Centre for Human Rights and Others v. United Republic of Tanzania* (previously cited), para. 149.

⁴³³ Amnesty International, *Amnesty International’s Responses to the OEWGA Questionnaire: Identification of Possible Gaps in the Protection of the Human Rights of Older Persons and How to Best Address Them* (Index: IOR 40/7452/2023), 24 November 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/7452/2023/en/>.

6.2 NATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Ghanaian constitution guarantees fundamental human rights and freedoms including the right to life, human dignity, good health care and freedom from discrimination.⁴³⁴ In addition, the constitution requires the government to “maintain a decent standard of living” for older people and to abolish “traditional practices which are injurious to the health and well-being of the person”.⁴³⁵

The Criminal Code of 1960 criminalizes attempt to commit murder, manslaughter, causing harm, threat of harm, threat of death and trial by ordeal.⁴³⁶ The latter would include forcing someone to drink a poisonous substance “which is likely to result in the death of or bodily injury to any party”.⁴³⁷ Those provisions could be used to prosecute witchcraft-related attacks.

The Domestic Violence Act of 2007 defines domestic relation broadly. Under the act, a domestic relationship “means a family relationship, a relationship akin to a family relationship or a relationship in a domestic situation that exists or has existed between a complainant and a respondent and includes a relationship where the complainant (a) is or has been married to the respondent; (b) lives with the respondent in a relationship in the nature of a marriage... (e) and respondent are family members related by consanguinity, affinity or adoption, or would be so related if they were married either customarily or under an enactment or were able to be married or if they were living together as spouses although they are not married; (f) and respondent share or shared the same residence or are cotenants; (g) is a parent, an elderly blood relation or is an elderly person who is by law a relation of the respondent”.⁴³⁸ Under the Act, survivors of domestic violence are to receive free medical treatment from the state after making a complaint. Additionally, the state has the obligation to set up a fund to be used in part for the rehabilitation and reintegration of the victims as well as for the construction of shelters in different regions and districts to provide survivors with safe havens.⁴³⁹

Although the national legal framework provides some protection, there are no legal provisions or law specifically addressing witchcraft accusations, the need for prevention of this harmful practice and specific protection for people accused of witchcraft.

⁴³⁴ Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (previously cited), articles 13, 15, 34(2), 17.

⁴³⁵ Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (previously cited), articles 37(6)(b), 39(2).

⁴³⁶ Ghana, Criminal Code (previously cited).

⁴³⁷ Ghana, Criminal Code (previously cited), Section 315(1).

⁴³⁸ Ghana, Domestic Violence Act (previously cited), Section 2(1).

⁴³⁹ Ghana, Domestic Violence Act (previously cited), Section 30.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“I would like to ask the government if I could meet the president. I would tell him that any accuser, woman or man, should be sanctioned. The president should be checking the wellbeing in the camps. He has to make some time to do that. Accusers should be sanctioned because accusations create so much pain for us. Seeing how your children are discriminated against because of us. This is something terrible for us.”⁴⁴⁰

Yamina Alassane, resident of Kuku, April 2024

7.1 CONCLUSION

The predominance of witchcraft accusations and related abuses in the Northern and North East regions is an infringement to the right to life and security of people accused, mainly older women. The main obstacle to access justice is the fear of reporting. Women are not aware of their rights or feel that it would be culturally unacceptable to report a case to the police. The testimonies Amnesty International collected point to a failure by the state to establish an environment conducive to criminal investigations and prosecutions of witchcraft-related attacks which contributes to the recurrence of the accusations and related abuses. By not specifically providing a legal framework to address the prevalent harmful practice of witchcraft accusations, the Ghanaian authorities have failed in their duty to protect victims and potential ones. Moreover, women have no safe places to run to when they are accused of witchcraft as there are no state sponsored shelters for women victims of domestic abuses in the region despite a national law providing for it. There are ad hoc initiatives from local governments and CHRAJ to conduct sensibilization in relevant communities to counter the phenomenon, but it is not enough to actively and comprehensively combat stereotypes linked to witchcraft accusations.

Although the camps are a refuge for the persons accused of witchcraft, the standard of living there is inadequate. The government failed to ensure accused persons who are particularly vulnerable and unable to provide for themselves have economic and physical access to food, safe housing and clean water.

⁴⁴⁰ Interview in person with Yamina Alassane, resident of Kuku camp, 28 April 2024, Kuku camp.

Opportunities for livelihood are limited and there is no governmental programme aimed at specifically supporting victims of witchcraft accusations. Some residents, not all, receive limited assistance from the government under the form of livelihood payments every couple of months, but the payments often elapse and is insufficient.

The floors and roofs of the huts in the camps are old and some women do not have the help they need for the upkeep of their living quarters. Because they are particularly vulnerable and unable to provide adequate accommodation for themselves, the government has the duty to fulfil that basic need and failed to do so. In most camps, women have to walk for hours to be able to fetch water as piped water is inaccessible in the camp despite a national policy to make it accessible to everyone. Health insurance and health services in the surroundings are not enough for women who have serious or ongoing health conditions. As such, the state does not provide enough access to quality healthcare to persons in the camps who are particularly at risk, leaving them over reliant on the support of NGOs or other individuals.

The prevalence of witchcraft accusations shows that the belief in witchcraft is entrenched in several communities and that only criminalising the practice of witchcraft accusations and related abuses would not resolve the issue. The government should address the root causes of the abuses by establishing coordinated preventive measures to stop new accusations and new arrivals in the camps, including a long-term campaign strategy to sensitize affected communities on the issue, and long-term investments in the concerned regions. The government should also provide reparations (including reintegration programmes) and protection to persons who suffered abuses due to an accusation.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of these conclusions, Amnesty International is making a series of recommendations to the Ghanaian authorities, other states, in particular those maintaining strong diplomatic, cultural, economic and political ties with the Ghanaian government, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights and UN bodies.

7.2.1 TO THE GHANAIAN AUTHORITIES

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Respect the right to freedom of religion and belief whilst ensuring that no one within its jurisdiction is deprived of the right to life, liberty or security of person because of religion or belief;
- The Ministry of Gender in coordination with local governments should:
 - Establish a long-term national strategy to sensitize impacted populations about the harm caused by witchcraft accusations taking into consideration the intersectionality of the discrimination victims face, and allocate enough resources to ensure that it is implemented in a sustained manner in consultation and coordination with traditional and religious leaders, women as well as men in the communities;
 - Sensitize women in impacted regions about their right to remedy including to seek justice and reparation, particularly in cases involving threats and/or physical attacks accompanying witchcraft accusations, as well as their rights concerning land ownership; allocate sufficient resources to enable a long-term implementation of such activities;
 - Set up a long-term coordinated national awareness-campaign challenging cultural and social practices discriminating against women and older people, including witchcraft accusations, and allocate enough resources for it;
 - Provide funding for local NGOs that implement human rights education programmes to sensitize communities on harmful practices;
 - Work in collaboration with the Ministry of Education to include in schools' curricula information on human rights and gender equality;
 - Work in collaboration with the Ministry of Education to ensure easy access to schools to girls especially in remote and rural areas and discourage dropouts;
 - Maintain data on the prevalence of the attacks linked to witchcraft accusations by districts and the characteristics of the people attacked and use the information to adapt sensitization strategies and national policies;

- Ensure that there are development programmes in the affected regions to increase livelihood opportunities there;
 - Revise regulations and policies to prevent gender-based violence towards older women.
- The parliament and the president should:
 - Ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
 - Ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa;
 - Pass legislation specifically criminalizing witchcraft accusations and related abuses, which should include protective measures for potential victims and should not force anyone to leave the camps.
- The Ministry of Justice and Attorney-General's Department in partnership with the Ghana Police Service should provide training to police officers, judges, traditional leaders and religious leaders on any new legislation on witchcraft accusations and on applying them in a gender and age-sensitive manner;

JUSTICE AND REPARATION

- Ensure the police department has enough resources to respond to incidents and there are enough police stations close to areas witchcraft accusations are predominant;
- Ensure chiefs have the duty to report witchcraft-related incidents;
- Ensure that police officers intervening when there is an incident and receiving complaints are trained on how to handle sexual gender-based violence and elder abuse;
- Ensure systematic, prompt and efficient investigations and prosecutions on incidents linked to witchcraft accusations;
- Provide support and effective protection for victims, including livelihood programs and adequate government shelters for sexual and gender-based violence survivors in all the regions;
- Adopt a survivor-centred approach in providing reparations; take into consideration the intersecting layers of discrimination while responding to ritual attacks and adapt support to victims accordingly;
- Ensure access to livelihood and the right to adequate food, clean water and adequate housing in all the camps without any kind of discrimination;
- Ensure everyone in all the camps receive regular financial assistance;
- Ensure everyone in all the camps are registered for the LEAP programme and receive it regularly;
- Reform the LEAP programme to: ensure harmonization of criteria for fees exemption, increase coverage and amount provided to beneficiaries, better coordinate with other programmes and secure regular funding;
- Ensure all children in camps go to school, including by providing additional support to people unable to support their family;
- Ensure people in the camp are all covered by health insurance and extend coverage for people in the camps including for medicines;
- Establish a national strategy and enough resources for progressively and safely reintegrating people accused of witchcraft and ensure they have adequate living standards:
 - Engage in individual consultation and mediation for each reintegration initiative;
 - Allow people who want to remain in the camps to stay with adequate living conditions and do not close the camps as long as there are people currently there who wish to remain.

7.2.2 TO OTHER STATES / GHANA'S DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

- Assist the Ghanaian authorities with funding for sensitization on witchcraft accusations and related abuses;
- Significantly increase technical and financial assistance to support access to LEAP for accused people;
- Assist the Ghanaian authorities with training of police, judges and traditional chiefs on SGBV;
- Support the drafting and adoption at the United Nations of an international convention on the protection of the rights of older people.

7.2.3 TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS

- Call on the Ghanaian authorities to pass legislation specifically criminalizing witchcraft accusations and ritual attacks, which should include protective measures for potential victims and should not force women to leave the camps;
- Take into account the issue of witchcraft accusations and its impact on human rights in Africa in the review of state reports and human rights monitoring.

7.2.4 TO UN SPECIAL PROCEDURES AND TREATY BODIES

- Consider witchcraft accusations in Ghana and its impact on women and older people in the country reviews and visits.

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BRANDED FOR LIFE

HOW WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS LEAD TO HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS OF HUNDREDS OF WOMEN IN NORTH GHANA

Human rights abuses linked to witchcraft accusations are recurrent in the north of Ghana and can lead to death. The abuses target mostly older women. Despite the prevalence of the incidents, the cases are rarely reported and investigated. The failure of the state to provide a long-term coordinated sensitization campaign in those regions to combat negative gender stereotypes at the origin of the accusations, and the absence of a law specifically addressing this phenomenon leads to the persistence of the abuses and the infringement of the right to life and security of those concerned. The accused women who survive end up in camps owned by traditional priests with limited access to livelihood, safe housing, clean water and quality healthcare, leaving them reliant on donations and help from others. They have to walk for hours to get water from the river. Those who are really sick cannot afford medications not covered by the health insurance. The Ghanaian authorities failed to ensure adequate standard of living for camps residents who live in remote areas and are particularly vulnerable due to their age and economic situation.