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His Excellency Nana Akufo-Addo,  
President of Ghana  
The Presidency of the Republic of Ghana  
Jubilee House, Kanda  
Accra  
Ghana

8 March 2024

Your Excellency,

## **THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN ACCUSED OF WITCHCRAFT SHOULD BE PROTECTED**

As women's rights are today on Ghana's agenda, we, civil society organizations, are writing to you to reiterate our concerns about a pressing issue that continues to exist in Ghana and violates the human rights of countless people, especially women; witchcraft accusations targeting mainly older women threaten several of their human rights including their right to non-discrimination, their right to an adequate standard of living, their right to health (physical and mental) and their right to life. On International Women's Day, it is imperative that we confront this issue head-on and call for decisive action to eradicate these egregious violations of human rights. In that sense, we call you to urgently reintroduce before the parliament or assent to the bill to proscribe witchcraft accusations.

As in many parts of the world, the belief in witchcraft still exists in Ghana, but this country is the only one where physical facilities have developed to shelter women accused of witchcraft. Mainly found in the Northern and North East Regions, the so-called witch camps, six currently, with a disproportionate number of female victims (93%<sup>1</sup>) banished from their communities after being accused of practicing witchcraft. Allegations often stem from claims that the accusers have suffered various misfortune – ranging from illness, death, accidents, poor harvest, or infertility.<sup>2</sup> Often facing death threats, these women find themselves socially, physically, economically, and psychologically ostracized from their communities into deplorable living conditions. Witchcraft accusations not only reflect and perpetuate stigmatizing and discriminatory beliefs but also serve as a means of dehumanizing and marginalizing women, often elderly and widowed. Fatal incidences of gender-based violence, such as the infamous case of 90-year-old Akua Denteh - accused of being a witch and publicly lynched in the Savannah Region in 2020 - should no longer be tolerated. It is a stark reminder of the urgent need to prevent further atrocities and ensure that innocent lives and vulnerable people are protected.

In this sense, the bill passed by parliament in July 2023 was a significant step forward towards ending the practice and reintegrating the hundreds of women currently languishing in camps. In addition, Ghana ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the

<sup>1</sup> Lamnatu Adam and others, Depression and Quality of Life of People Accused of Witchcraft and Living in Alleged Witches' Camps in Northern Ghana, 14 February 2023, <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/hsc/2023/6830762/>

<sup>2</sup> Songtaba Ghana, Prevalence of Depression, Quality of Life and Gender Dynamics of Women Accused of Witchcraft in Northern and North East Regions of Ghana, February 2022, <https://www.songtaba.org/songtaba-report-on-mental-health-status-in-ghana/>

Child respectively in 1986 and 1990, and both Committees defined accusations of witchcraft as a harmful practice.<sup>3</sup> We therefore collectively urge you, Mr. President, to comply with Ghana's statutory commitment to combat harmful gender stereotypes under CEDAW and take multiple-level measures to address the root causes of the practice. We also urge you to take immediate decisive action to reintroduce the bill to Parliament and sign the bill into law as soon as possible to criminalize the practice of declaring, accusing, naming, or labelling people as witches. This could be accompanied by comprehensive measures to provide support and rehabilitation for the women currently in the camps ensuring their reintegration into society with dignity and respect. It should include access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities as well as psychological support to address the trauma the victims have endured.

Mr. President, the time to act is now. Let us stand together in solidarity with the women across the country, reaffirming our dedication to justice, equality, and the intrinsic dignity of every individual.

Co-signatories:

- Action Aid Ghana
- Amnesty International
- International Alliance against Witch Hunts
- Legal Resources Centre
- Songtaba
- The Sanneh Institute
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Ghana
- Youth for Human Rights Africa

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<sup>3</sup> UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Joint General Recommendation 31: Harmful Practices, 8 May 2019, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/31/Rev.1, para 9; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), General Comment 18: Harmful Practices, 8 May 2019, UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/18/Rev.1 para. 9.