AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL



BRANDED FOR LIFE

Witchcraft Accusations and the Fight for Dignity in the North of Ghana

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Cover photo: Women accused of witchcraft, December 2023 / April 2024. © Amnesty International

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GLOSSARY

Soothsayer: Someone believed to see the future.
LEAP: Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty programme.
Traditional priest: Local spiritual leader who performs rituals

INTRODUCTION

"They said I was a witch. I had to run for my life." – Lari, Gambaga Camp

Across the north of Ghana, hundreds of women are living in makeshift camps after being banished from their homes. Accused of witchcraft—often after the death of a relative or a troubling dream—these women are targeted for who they are: older, poor, widowed, or outspoken. Their exile is not only a cultural injustice but a violation of their most basic human rights.

This document captures their voices, exposes the systemic failures that allow this abuse, and calls for action. It is a tribute to their resilience and a demand for justice.



A SYSTEM OF VIOLENCE

Why women are accused—and what it costs them.

In the north of Ghana, the accusation of witchcraft is often triggered by tragedy: the death of a loved one, a mysterious illness, a bad harvest. Sometimes it stems from a dream. But beneath these triggers lie deeper roots: **discrimination**, poverty, and fear.

Those most often accused are older women, especially widows, childless women, or those who challenge traditional norms. Jealousy, unresolved disputes, and community tensions often fuel the fire.

Once accused, there is little recourse. Many women are attacked, threatened, or forcibly expelled. Most flee to **camps** where they live out the rest of their days in poverty and isolation.






STORIES OF SURVIVAL




Zeinabou* – Gambaga Camp

“My rival said I was bewitching her. My husband supported her. I was sent away to the camp. That day they left me as you leave a goat tied in some place.”

Zeinabou is in her nineties and has lived in Gambaga camp for many years. She was accused by her co-wife after a series of disputes. Her husband’s family chose to believe the accusation. She was then taken to a soothsayer, who declared her a witch.

She was brought to Gambaga camp with only a cloth and two cedis.

Now almost blind and sick, she lives alone and relies on small donations. **“I won’t go back. I have no one there. Here, I am waiting for death. If the camp closes, I have nowhere to go.”**

Zeinabou is an alias used to protect the identity of the interviewee.



Zina – Kukuo Camp

“I was accused of killing a boy I didn’t know. The youth gathered. They had sticks. I was told to leave or die. My brother saved me.”

Zina, around 80 years old, was once a farmer. Accused over two decades ago, she was sent to Kukuo camp. Today, she lives with her brother’s grandson. She survives on the help of others, struggles with a painful knee, and hasn’t received her LEAP grant in months. She says she will never return home. **“They lied about me. God will judge them.”**



Ajishetu – Kukuo Camp

“I was accused after my neighbour died of headaches. A group of young men told me I had to leave or they would deal with me.”

Ajishetu lived with her husband and six children. After his death, she became an easy target. When her neighbour passed away, people said she had bewitched her. With no police nearby and no support from the local chief, she fled to Kukuo camp in 2010.

Now she survives by helping on nearby farms. **“I don’t want to go back to my community because of what they have done to me.”**



Lari – Gambaga Camp

"I was accused after my son died in an accident. They said I killed him. It was my husband's brother who started it."

After repeated threats and visits from hostile neighbours, Lari's family had no choice but to bring her to Gambaga camp. She has lived there since 2015. She deeply misses her grandchildren and wishes to clear her name one day.



Wuni – Gambaga Camp

"I don't even know why I was accused. Someone said they saw me in a dream. That was enough."

Wuni was banished to Gambaga Camp following a dream someone from her community claimed to have. The accusation spread and she was forced to leave. Despite her age and the trauma, she speaks up for the younger women, urging them to resist silence and shame.

READ COMPLETE TESTIMONIES IN OUR STORY PAGE OR OUR REPORT

STORY PAGE

REPORT



Mariama* – Kpatinga Camp

“They beat my friend so badly she didn’t survive. I was next.”

Mariama lost her closest friend to a fatal beating. She fled to Kpatinga camp, where she now tries to find peace. Her story is a painful reminder of the danger these accusations pose.

Mariama is an alias used to protect the identity of the interviewee.



Morowa* – Gnani Camp

“My own family turned on me. They said I used witchcraft to curse them. I never had a chance to explain.”

In Gnani camp, Morowa lives with other women accused of witchcraft. She finds strength in their company but says she dreams of justice, not just survival. **“I want people to know the truth. We are not witches. We are women.”**

Morowa is an alias used to protect the identity of the interviewee.

LIFE IN THE CAMPS

Surviving, not living.

These camps are not designed for healing or reintegration—they are spaces of abandonment. In Kukuo, Gambaga, Gnani, and Kpatinga, residents live in old huts with porous thatched roofs and floors that dissolve into mud when it rains. The structures offer little protection, but they are the only form of shelter available.

The food situation is dire. Those who are able to, farm in local plantations during the harvest season in exchange for food. However, some of the accused are older women or **live with disabilities** and are no longer able to farm. They depend on the goodwill of neighbours or distant relatives. On some days, they go hungry. On others, they survive on porridge or maize. Some women recall going days without solid food.

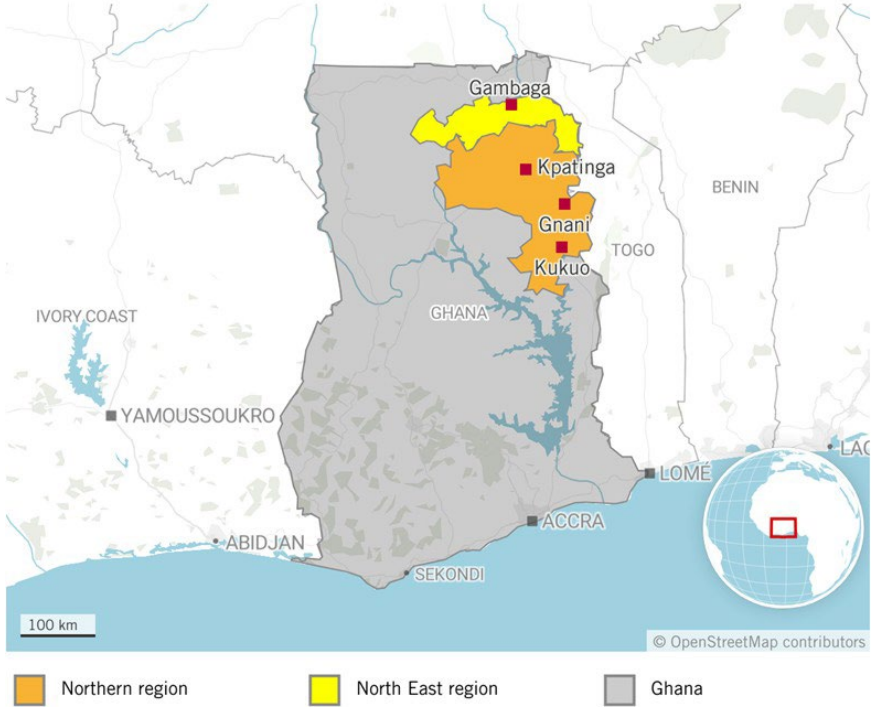
The government's LEAP programme is meant to offer financial support, but for many, it is inconsistent and insufficient. Payments are often delayed for months, and when they do arrive, they cannot cover the basic cost of food or medication. Women express frustration and despair over the lack of a reliable safety net.

Access to clean water is inconsistent. In some camps, residents must walk for hours to reach the nearest stream or river **because piped water is inaccessible**. Some rely on neighbours or their grandchildren to fill their containers, a dependence that adds to their sense of vulnerability.

Health care is a persistent challenge. Most have health insurance cards, but they don't always cover the necessary medicines for serious or chronic illnesses. They take painkillers when they can afford them and if their local clinics have them. Otherwise, they must rely on others' financial help or take nothing at all.

Beyond the physical struggles, the camps are places of emotional and psychological pain. Women live with the trauma of being rejected by their families and communities. **Although some of them still dream of being reunited with their loved ones**. In the meantime, they focus on survival and solidarity with the others who share their fate.

Location of the camps





ROOT CAUSES

Age, Gender, Power.

“Women are afraid to grow old in their communities.” – Representative of Songtaba

Accusations rarely come from strangers. They begin at home—from brothers, nephews, even sons. In a region marked by underdevelopment and poverty, older women are easy scapegoats.

Some are targeted for their success. Others, for their inability to work. Some are called witches because of their appearance—wrinkled skin, swollen legs, sagging breasts. These are natural signs of aging twisted into signs of evil.



STATE FAILURES

No protection. No justice.

Under international law, the state has a duty to protect its citizens. But when it comes to women in the north of Ghana, that duty is often ignored.

Police rarely intervene. Survivors fear retaliation if they report abuse. The legal system lacks clear frameworks to prosecute witchcraft-related violence.

Shelters are scarce. Most accused women find refuge only in the traditional camps. There is no clear path for reintegration for several of them. No protection from further accusations. Many will never leave.



HOPE AND SOLIDARITY

“We are not witches. We are women. We want peace.”

In the face of injustice, the women in the camps form strong bonds. They share food, stories, and strength. Some offer spiritual guidance to others. Many still dream of a better future for the next generation.

Their voices are rising. Their courage is our call to action.

THE MEN ACCUSED

Though most victims are women, some men are also accused. In Gnani camp, which is the largest, men live in exile much like the women—but their paths often differ. Some are able to bring their wives and children, while others are forced to leave their families behind due to lack of resources and support. Even when accompanied by family, the men must struggle to provide under challenging conditions.

Their accusations, too, often stem from misfortunes such as deaths, illnesses, or dreams. Some are accused after their mothers are banished, as guilt by association takes hold. In some cases, they are targeted for being successful or simply for offering support to previously accused women. These accusations serve as a warning to others: loyalty comes with risk.

Despite the trauma, many men maintain strong ties with their families. Some still try to support their children's education from the camp. Others express deep regret over the lives they once had. One man, accused after donating blood to a sick woman who later died, still questions how acts of compassion turned into evidence of sorcery.

Like the women, these men live with the scars of betrayal and displacement. Their stories remind us that while women bear the brunt of accusations, the social fabric is torn for everyone. Justice for the accused must include all genders and challenge the broader systems that enable scapegoating.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Take action. Change lives.

We demand:

- A national law criminalizing witchcraft accusations and related abuses
- Safe, state-run shelters and reintegration programmes
- A sustained awareness campaign to challenge harmful beliefs
- Regular, sufficient LEAP payments to all camp residents
- Justice and reparations for survivors

You can:

- Share this digest
- Join our campaign: #BrandedForLife
- Support local organizations working with survivors
- Pressure the President to act by signing our petition

BEHIND THE RESEARCH

Between 2023 and 2025, Amnesty International conducted in-depth field research in four camps. 93 people accused of witchcraft were interviewed. Many names were changed for protection.

We thank all the brave women and men who shared their stories. We thank our partners: Songtaba, ActionAid Ghana, The Sanneh Institute, and many others.

SCAN TO TAKE ACTION NOW

DOWNLOAD THE FULL REPORT



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