

Tanzania: We're Doomed Unless We Shun Superstition

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An Albino boy carries a baby in Oromi IDP camp, Kitgum District, northern Uganda, 17 May 2007. Each segment of the civilian population in the north faces its own horrors. Boys are kidnapped by the LRA and brutally indoctrinated into life as soldiers.

Reports from a village in Mpanda District in Katavi Region, that three women were killed allegedly for using their witchery to deny the area rain, are most disturbing.

Rains, which have traditionally fallen at this time of the year, failed this time around and the villagers, apparently after consultations with some soothsayer, "learned" that the women, aged 64, 74 and 80 respectively, were responsible!

What a pity that a country which purports to march with the rest of the world in the 21st century - touted as the era of science and technology - has a citizenry that would link lack of rain to acts of witchcraft.

Killings of the elderly on witchcraft beliefs have been endemic in parts of Tanzania and have widely been documented in areas like Shinyanga and Mwanza.

Ours is also a nation with some people who commission common criminals to kill fellow humans who happen to be albinos, ostensibly for their body parts, which are stupidly said to be raw material for get-rich quick talismans.

How come that 50 years after independence, which has meant more education for the majority of the population, we continue to have so many amongst our people steeped in backward beliefs on the supernatural?

We have all these so-called charismatic preachers whose sermons are, as a matter of course, dominated by talk about demons, djinns, witches, saucer fliers, get-rich prayers, come-receive-your-miracle invitations, talk of ominous neighbours and relatives... everything imaginable about the unseen and the unverifiable.

These same clerics will be heard telling their flock to shun "ushirikina" - superstition - and believe only in God, while they persistently perpetuate fear on the existence of non-existent, unseen evil (or even good) powers! Is it a wonder that a global survey last year exposed Tanzania as one of most superstitious nations in Africa?

There is need for education institutions, sociologists and genuine men and women of God to devise ways of enlightening people on the basics of nature and genuine worship if we are to rid the country of witchcraft killings.

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