



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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14 June 2005

### NGA100176.E

Nigeria: The belief in witchcraft; treatment of those accused of being witches and the treatment of their families; police reaction to the killing of those accused of being witches; whether there are safe areas or villages to which those accused of being witches can go (October 2002-June 2005)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

International and national media and academic sources claim that the belief in witchcraft, or "juju," is widespread in Nigeria (BBC 17 Mar. 2005; *ibid.* 6 Aug. 2004; *Daily Champion* 13 Aug. 2004; Onyejekwe Jan. 2003). Their reports reveal that the practice of witchcraft in Nigeria is invariably linked with stories of magical powers, wizardry, suspicious events, and murder (BBC 17 Mar. 2005; *This Day* 18 Mar. 2004; *Vanguard* 18 Nov. 2004; *ibid.* 30 Nov. 2004; *The News* 29 Nov. 2004; *Daily Champion* 3 Dec. 2004).

BBC News reported that Jacob Wakfan, a 35-year old man from Plateau State, confessed to murdering his friend in order to sell his body parts, namely the penis and tongue, for use in witchcraft rituals (17 Mar. 2005). According to the report, body parts are believed to strengthen the power of charms that are used by traditional healers to cure ailments (BBC 17 Mar. 2005). Wakfan was convicted of murder and sentenced to death by hanging (*ibid.*).

*This Day*, one of Nigeria's national daily newspapers, reported that 77-year old Ukabi Njoku from Asaga Ohafia, Abia State, was beaten to death on suspicion of being a wizard (18 Mar. 2004). A former member of the Asaga People's Assembly (APA), Njoku was allegedly killed by six members of Ndi Ibeahi, a local vigilante group (*This Day* 18 Mar. 2004). Members of Njoku's family were apparently threatened with death if they reported the killing to the police (*ibid.*).

In another incident, *Vanguard*, a national daily newspaper, reported that local youths killed four people in the village of Eyuma, Cross River State, because they suspected them of being witches and wizards responsible for the deaths of two local clergymen (*Vanguard* 18 Nov. 2004).

A mass killing of suspected witches and wizards in Ozalla, Edo State, captured the attention of a number of media sources (*Daily Champion* 3 Dec. 2004; *Vanguard* 30 Nov. 2004; *The News* 29 Nov. 2004). According to the reports, between 25 and 27 people died after they consumed a tonic that was prepared by a native doctor to determine whether or not they were witches or wizards (*ibid.*; *Daily Champion* 3 Dec. 2004; *Vanguard* 30 Nov. 2004). Prominent members of the community believed that a series of unfortunate events spanning several years was the result of occult forces and that a community-wide purging of witches and wizards would remedy the problem (*ibid.*, *Daily Champion* 3 Dec. 2004; *The News* 29 Nov. 2004). The community leaders believed that those involved in witchcraft would die after drinking the potion, while those who were not involved would merely vomit (*ibid.*; *Daily Champion* 3 Dec. 2004;

*Vanguard* 30 Nov. 2004). Paul Ochonu, the state Police Commissioner, apparently ordered an inquiry and the arrest and prosecution of those involved in the killings (*The News* 29 Nov. 2004). According to *The News*, a weekly newspaper published in Lagos, killing those suspected of witchcraft is not new to the town of Ozalla-alleged witches and wizards were lynched and their houses burned in 2002 (29 Nov. 2004).

Professor O. Oko Elechi of the Criminal Justice Department at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, has written extensively on the criminal justice system in Nigeria (UWP 5 May 2005). In a presentation to the International Society for the Reform of Criminal Law entitled *Extra-Judicial Killings in Nigeria-The Case of Afikpo Town*, Elechi claims that since 2001, those suspected of witchcraft in the town of Afikpo, Ebonyi State, have been burnt to death in public by local vigilante groups (24-28 Aug. 2003). Elechi explains that although the town of Afikpo usually addresses issues of sorcery and witchcraft through its indigenous justice system, vigilante groups have begun to enforce their own system of justice (24-28 Aug. 2003).

The Curator of the National Museum in Lagos, Umebe N. Onyejekwe, wrote a research paper that provides details of the beliefs of several ethnic groups regarding the existence of witchcraft in Nigeria (Jan. 2003). Entitled *Witchcraft: Myth Of A Curious Institution*, Onyejekwe's report also includes information on how one becomes a witch, how witches operate and how witches are detected (Onyejekwe Jan. 2003). Too long to be summarized here and too rich in information to be passed over, Onyejekwe's paper is attached to this Response for reference.

Information on safe areas or villages to which those accused of being witches can go could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

## References

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\_\_\_\_\_. 18 November 2004. George Onah. "Four Killed, Houses Razed As Youths React to Clergymen's Death." <<http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200411180454.html>> [Accessed 9 June 2005]

### **Attachment**

Onyejekwe, Umebe N. January 2003. *Witchcraft: Myth Of A Curious Institution*. (Niger Delta Congress) <[http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/warticles/witchcraft\\_myth\\_of\\_a\\_curious\\_ins.htm](http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/warticles/witchcraft_myth_of_a_curious_ins.htm)> [Accessed 9 June 2005]

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