

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Parliament Passes Anti-Witchcraft Bill

The Parliament of Ghana has passed the long-awaited Bill to proscribe witchcraft accusations, which seeks to criminalise the practice of declaring, accusing, naming, or labelling people as witches. This comes after concerted efforts by numerous stakeholders to combat the ongoing social menace of witchcraft accusations which primarily target poor, older, and widowed women.

The social canker of witchcraft allegations is so destructive that it “tears families apart, endangers social cohesion, creates orphans needlessly, and forces vulnerable women away from their homes, loved ones, children, and grandchildren,” according to a recent statement released by the new Coalition Against Witchcraft Accusations (CAWA).

In July 2020, a 90-year-old woman, Akua Denteh was lynched in her community at Kafaba in the Savana region following witchcraft allegations. The incident shook the conscience of the nation, prompting numerous stakeholders to work together to curb such happenings. Two women found guilty of her death have since been handed a 12-year jail sentence.

During a roundtable at the residence of the British High Commissioner in September 2022, Minister for Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MoGCSP), Lariba Zuweira Abudu, reiterated the Ministry’s commitment to work with other stakeholders to end witchcraft accusations in Ghana and to resettle victims who have been confined to alleged witches’ camps.

An evidenced-based research report prepared by women’s rights organisation, Songtaba, which was presented at the roundtable identified that “over half of the women living in the camps were experiencing depression and about 97% of them have a low quality of life”. Songtaba has been supported by Ghana Somubi Dwumadie, a four-year disability programme in Ghana, with a specific focus on mental health, funded by UK aid.

Lamnatu Adam, Executive Director of Songtaba says “We cannot afford to fail the vulnerable women in our communities who should be free to grow old with dignity since we owe a duty to protect them. I am happy that for the first time the law has taken a bite to punish perpetrators of witchcraft accusation and to criminalise the act”.

The Bill was passed by Parliament late on Thursday 27th July 2023, providing protection for victims of witchcraft accusations in Ghana. The Bill now awaits Presidential assent.

Member of Parliament Honorable Francis Xavier Sosu, who championed the Bill along with several co-sponsors said “Ghana is a democracy that is striving and I sincerely commend colleagues who worked with me on the anti-witchcraft allegations Bill. As we move forward, I am confident that the criminalisation of witchcraft accusations will have a lasting positive impact on our society. I am overjoyed. It is my hope that this decision will serve as a catalyst for further reforms aimed at creating a fair and equitable criminal justice system that focuses on prevention, rehabilitation, and restorative justice.”

About Songtaba

Songtaba is a women-led advocacy organization committed to securing the basic rights for women and children, in the Northern, Savannah and North East regions of Ghana. The mission of Songtaba is to work with poor women and children in identifying the root causes of their impoverishment and addressing them in a rights-based manner. Core of the mission of Songtaba is working with very excluded women in our communities (women who have been accused as witches and banished to live in camps settlements), persons with disabilities, women smallholder farmers to have long term access to productive resources, girls and their networks in protecting them from all forms of violence including child and forced marriages and young women by supporting them to develop alternative livelihood skills.

About Ghana Somubi Dwumadie

Ghana Somubi Dwumadie (Ghana Participation Programme) is a four-year disability programme in Ghana, with a specific focus on mental health. This programme is funded with UK Aid from the UK government. The programme is run by an Options led consortium, which also consists of BasicNeeds-Ghana, Kings College London, Sightsavers, and Tropical Health, and focuses on four key areas:

1. Promoting stronger policies and systems that respect the rights of people with disabilities, including people with mental health disabilities
2. Scaling up high-quality and accessible mental health services
3. Reducing stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities, including mental health disabilities
4. Generating evidence to inform policy and practice on the effectiveness of disability and mental health programmes and interventions

The programme gave a large grant to Songtaba, which is helping to improve the lives of women accused of witchcraft and living in alleged witches' camps in northern Ghana, by working with other stakeholders to prevent accusations and to reintegrate alleged witches back into their communities.

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