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### **For interviews, please contact:**

Joy Taylor, Executive Assistant to Peter Ash

Tel: +1-604-587-6502

Email: [media@underthesamesun.com](mailto:media@underthesamesun.com)

[www.underthesamesun.com](http://www.underthesamesun.com)

## **INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION VISITS TANZANIA TO INVESTIGATE THE WITCHCRAFT-RELATED SLAUGHTER OF PEOPLE WITH ALBINISM.**

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***“We are being hunted like animals – please help us!!”***

This is the heart-wrenching cry of 170,000 people with albinism in Tanzania.

On January 20, 2009, Tanzanian BBC Bureau Chief Vicky Ntetema received information from Tanzanian police officials that from January 14-19, 2009, three persons with albinism were butchered to death in the Muleba district of the Kagera Region near Lake Victoria. The dismembered victims were two boys aged 2 and 6, and a 28 year old man. These three witchcraft-related murders bring the number of officially documented cases to 41.

*“The global community **MUST ACT QUICKLY,**”* pleads Peter Ash, a Canadian business leader and philanthropist who himself has albinism. In late 2008 Ash, who is the Founder/Director of Canadian non-profit organization **Under The Same Sun**, returned from Tanzania where he had led an international delegation. The group had gone there on a fact-finding mission to examine the witchcraft-related murders of Tanzanians with albinism.

Albinism is a genetic condition causing the absence of pigmentation in the hair, skin and eyes. Most people with this condition (albinos) are legally blind. Albinism affects one in 20,000 people globally, but occurs over 7 times as often in Eastern Africa. Current Tanzanian estimates place the incidence of albinism at one in 3,000.

To date there have been 41 documented cases of people with albinism being butchered to death - their limbs, heads and genitals hacked off. The Tanzanian albino community places the murder toll much higher at approximately 60 cases. Many of those targeted are children – in one case, a victim was just 6 months of age. Ash interviewed a mother who recounted the grisly murder of her 5-year old daughter. The girl’s brothers and sisters had watched as the child was dismembered one limb at a time. The attackers had smashed the house door in, slit the 5-year old girl’s throat, drained her blood into a cooking pot and drank it on the spot. They then hacked off her arms and legs one-at-a-time, leaving only the child’s torso behind. Many of these cases have already been reported by the major press organizations such as the BBC, the New York Times, NBC, Al-Jazeera, etc.

The fact-finding group, comprised of members from Canada, the US, South Africa and Tanzania, met with hundreds of people from within the Tanzanian albinism community who are living in fear and despair. Over and over, the group was told that “the Government and Police talk much but do nothing to prosecute the killers” as well as the destitute cry that “we are being hunted like animals”.

The trade in albino body parts is very lucrative, with one leg yielding up to US\$2,000 – a phenomenal amount in one of the world’s poorest countries. This market in human bodyparts stems from beliefs promoted by witch doctors that the blood, hair or other parts of a person with albinism - when combined in a special potion - will make its user rich.

To worsen matters, local Tanzanian media are reporting that some members of the Tanzanian police and other government officials have been involved in the scheme and have benefited financially from the proceeds of this grisly crime against humanity (***THIS DAY, Dar es Salaam, Nov. 28/08 and THE CITIZEN, Dar es Salaam, Dec. 24/08***).

During the visit, the delegation met with several senior government officials, including the Minister of Home Affairs and the Minister of State (Good Governance). They presented a petition of over 5,000 signatures from around the world expressing alarm about the murders. However, despite clear assurances that the Tanzanian government was doing everything possible to stop these gruesome crimes against people with albinism, the public record shows that **THERE HAS NOT YET BEEN A SINGLE PROSECUTION** of any person apprehended in connection with the murders.

The delegation traveled to the Mwanza area near Lake Victoria, where approximately 2/3 of the murders have occurred. Shortly after arrival, Ash and others in the group with albinism were shouted at by onlookers yelling “Deal! Deal!” (a common taunt directed towards albinos meaning that possession of an albino’s body means a “deal” can be made to sell him, i.e. parts of him, for large sums of cash.)

In the Mwanza area, the group met with the families of victims and visited a 12-year old albino child who survived the attack, but lost her leg. They also visited a residential school for visually-impaired children where 63 albino children have fled in hopes of greater security. Prior to the witchcraft-related killings in the area, the school housed only a small number of children with albinism. Due to overcrowding, the living conditions in the school are deplorable.

**Under The Same Sun** is calling on the International community to seriously support the Tanzanian government in taking **WHATEVER STEPS NECESSARY** to end this slaughter of innocent civilians.

Ash implores all members of any civil society to join hands on this issue. “Please rise up for human dignity,” Ash begs. “Rise up for those being butchered week in and week out. Learn from the holocaust, where too many people took far too long to act. As Edmund Burke has wisely remarked: *All that is needed for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing*. Please **DO SOMETHING**. Reach out to the media and your country’s political leaders and implore them to act swiftly so another child does not have to be mutilated and killed in front of her family.”

Ash has been interviewed on this subject by several large media outlets in Canada, the UK and in Tanzania itself.



On Oct. 17/08, this albino woman from NW Tanzania was attacked and her arms were chopped off. She was six months pregnant at the time, however she later miscarried. (her facial features have been blurred to protect her identity) **Photograph by Josephat Mwanzi.**



12-year old Tanzanian albino girl recovering in hospital after she was attacked and her right leg was cut off. (her facial features have been blurred to protect her identity) **Photo courtesy of TSN Daily News**



**Courtesy: Al Jazeera**



**Courtesy: Al Jazeera**



**Courtesy: Al Jazeera**