

My People! My People!



Der unseren Lesern seit langem bekannte furchtlose Kämpfer gegen die Hexenverfolgungen in Afrika, mein langjähriger Freund Leo Igwe (Nigeria), hat erneut eine Pfingstkirche ausfindig gemacht, die offen zum Mord an "Hexen" aufruft. Leo hat derzeit einen Forschungsauftrag zum Thema an der Universität Bayreuth, publiziert aber weiterhin zur Sache, hier in saharareporters.com.

The potentially dangerous activities of a new local church in Cross River-Akwa Ibom states axis of the country should be of concern to all people of conscience in Nigeria and beyond. This church, which habitually starts the themes of its crusade with "My Father! My Father!!..." appears to be on a fast track to causing a new wave of witchcraft related abuse, torture and killings in the region.

This church is owned and led by a boyish upstart pastor who addresses himself as 'God's Prophet' and as 'Prophet of signs and wonders'. It is not clear when and how he came about these titles, but like others in the business of pentecostalism, these appellations have become the trade mark of this evangelical entrepreneur. From an apartment in Calabar, Cross

River State, where it started, the church has grown so rich that it now organizes its meetings in some of the most expensive hotels in the region. But the issue is not whether this 'My Father Church' holds its events in cheap or expensive venues but what these programs are all about.

Recently, the prophetic ministry joined the vanguard of witch hunting churches that are fueling witchcraft related abuse in the region.

In what appears to be a clear and targeted attempt to undermine the progress which government and non-governmental agencies have made in the fight against witch hunting in Akwa Ibom, the church organized in March a crusade tagged 'Uyo Festival of Fire' at Ibom Hall in Uyo, the state capital. The theme of the crusade was 'My Father! My Father!! That Witch Must Die'.

Anyone who knows the Bible could easily notice a connection between the theme of the crusade and the biblical verse-Ex 22:18- which says 'Suffer not a Witch to live'. What is particularly disturbing is that the church staged the event at a time the state government is frantically battling to address this tragic situation. The crusade was a literal declaration of war against alleged witches and an unequivocal endorsement of witch hunting in the state.

Belief in witchcraft is very strong in the region. Witchcraft accusation is very common and witch hunting often erupts in this part of the country. Belief in witchcraft has caused many people to attack, abuse, torture, or kill their children or parents or grandparents whom they blamed for their misfortune.

In 2008, the government of Akwa Ibom came under international pressure following a documentary on the problem which was broadcast worldwide. The government hastily passed into law a bill that criminalized child witch stigmatization and took some measures to address the problem. Some non-governmental

organizations embarked on programs and projects to rescue victims and enlighten the people. In the past two years, significant progress has been made in persuading the local population from engaging in witchcraft related abuses.

At a time the efforts of government and non-governmental organizations appear to be yielding positive results, the Uyo Festival of Fire which literally sanctioned the execution of alleged witches, could re-ignite these horrific abuses, erode the gains that have been made so far and roll back the wheel of progress.

We must note that similar witch hunting crusades and revivals by self-styled prophets, evangelists and apostles in the past decades turned the region into a killing and abusing field.

Sadly, the government of Akwa Ibom, as in the past, stood by and allowed this campaign of hate and violence to be staged in the state.

Local authorities should as a matter of urgency start monitoring the activities of pastors, prophets, and evangelists in the region and ensure that their so called deliverance sessions, revivals and festivals are not used to incite hatred and violence against innocent citizens, particularly women, children and the elderly, in the name of witchcraft. State governments should not see this as interfering with the freedom of religion of these persons. In fact, freedom of religion does not include inciting hatred and violence against persons in the name of one's religious belief or inflicting torture, inhuman and degrading treatment on others in the name of religion. Freedom of religion is a human right and should be promoted, protected, defended and guaranteed. But inciting abuses or inflicting harm on people in the name of religion is a crime, and perpetrators should be punished.

For instance the government of Akwa Ibom should not have allowed the organization of the Festival of Fire. Even now the

program is over, the authorities could still arrest and prosecute the organizers for inciting hatred and violence or for aiding and abetting witchcraft accusation and child witch stigmatization. Local authorities should ensure that those who engage in witch hunting or those who fuel these savage crimes are made to face the full wrath of the law. Akwa Ibom and Cross River states have a long history of witch hunting. The authorities should be aware of this, and remain vigilant. They should do everything they can to ensure that the wave of witchcraft related violence and abuses that swept through the region in the past decades does not reoccur.

In conclusion, I say to the government and people in Akwa Ibom, Cross River and the entire Niger Delta: My People! My People!! This Witch Hunting Must Stop! My People! My People!! Those witch hunters must be arrested and brought to justice without delay.

For the sake of our women, children and elderly persons.

Die Meinung des Gastautors muss nicht der Redaktionsmeinung entsprechen.

Weitere Arbeiten desselben Autors siehe [hier](#).