



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**EMBARGOED TILL 9PM MONDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2010**

### **AFRUCA CALLS FOR NEW LAW TO CRIMINALISE THE BRANDING OF CHILDREN AS WITCHES**

Following the screening of the programme “Britain’s Witch Children” on Channel 4 Dispatches on 26 July 2010, AFRUCA – Africans Unite Against Child Abuse has re-iterated its call for a new UK law to criminalise the branding of children as witches or as possessed by evil spirits and is consulting various stakeholders to discuss its proposal.

Debbie Ariyo, Executive Director of AFRUCA said: “the Dispatches programme was a very powerful reminder of the terrible consequences the branding of children as witches can have on the children concerned. Of grave concern to us are the activities of some rogue pastors in our community who needlessly and falsely accuse vulnerable children of being witches or of being possessed by demons or evil spirits. While their motives are monetary, the terrible consequences of their evil acts on children can no longer be ignored. Branding a child as a witch is an incitement to harm and abuse children. It leads to extreme physical and emotional abuse as well as neglect of the children in question. It is a silent form of child abuse in our community and it is about time action is taken to address it.”

Of equal concern to us at AFRUCA are the abusive exorcism rites performed on children who are so branded by some pastors and other faith workers. Again, these rites lead to extreme harm and suffering by the children and has caused the death of at least one child in the UK. The impact of being branded as a witch and of having exorcism rites performed on children can have very dire and devastating consequences for the children involved.

“Our position at AFRUCA is always that culture and religion should never be a reason to abuse children. For this reason, it has become imperative for the government to act to curtail the activities of these rogue pastors. Our proposal for a law to ban the branding of children as witches has become necessary in order to protect children. Such a law will empower many people, especially Christians who are outraged at the way their religion is being used to harm children, to act”, Debbie Ariyo said.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

1. AFRUCA – Africans Unite Against Child Abuse is the premier charity promoting the rights and welfare of African children in the UK
2. AFRUCA is running three main projects across England which, among others, address the issues linked to accusations of witchcraft and spirit possession. The Safeguarding African Children in London Project delivers specialist training courses for practitioners on African cultural and religious values and practices to enable them gain the skills necessary to identify and intervene in cases of abuse linked to accusation of witchcraft and spirit possession. It also supports practitioners through the provision of expert advice on cases involving witchcraft accusations.
3. Our Child Protection Training and Awareness Raising for African Parents in England Programme is currently running in 4 London local authorities as well as in Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle. It aims to educate African parents on UK laws and regulations on the safeguarding and protection of children and provide them with new skills so they can identify what constitutes harm to children and how to prevent abuse.
4. AFRUCA has recently been funded to establish a project “Working with Faith Groups to Safeguard African Children in Yorkshire”. This will enable us to work with a range of faith organisations in the cities of Leeds, Bradford and Sheffield to strengthen their child protection policies and practices as well as work with faith workers and members of their congregation to improve their knowledge of child protection and child abuse prevention.
5. We have produced the “Safeguarding African Children in the UK” series of publications to help raise awareness about different forms of abuse in the African community and what needs to be done to safeguard children. In particular, our publication: “What is Witchcraft Abuse?” aims to educate about witchcraft branding. This publication is available in English and French and can be downloaded from our website.
6. AFRUCA is currently consulting on its proposals for a new law against child branding as witches. The first consultative event will hold on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> July in Central London. To book a place at this event, please contact Justin Bahunga at [justin@afruca.org](mailto:justin@afruca.org).
7. For further information about our work please visit [www.afruca.org](http://www.afruca.org). For interviews please call Debbie Ariyo, AFRUCA Director on 0207 7042261