



## **AFRUCA - AFRICANS UNITE AGAINST CHILD ABUSE**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Friday 30 June 2006**

### **AFRUCA RESPONDS TO THE DFES REPORT ON CHILD ABUSE AND WITCHCRAFT**

AFRUCA welcomes the recent DFES report on child abuse linked to accusations of “possessions” and “witchcraft”. We believe the report highlights key, disturbing issues relating to the abuse of children which cannot be ignored.

AFRUCA supports the report since it highlights the existence of this problem in different communities, without stigmatising any one community or drawing conclusions which might disproportionately paint any one community in a negative light.

While the report concludes that the belief in witchcraft is widespread, we are concerned it did not go deep enough to highlight the role of faith organisations in diagnosing child victims and in carrying out exorcism rites on children and adults alike. While we do not have any reasons to denounce any faith organisation, nor are we attempting to do so, we know that a lot of children and their families have fallen victim to the allure and deceit of rogue pastors who wrongly or without apparent reasons, diagnose people as witches and carry out bogus exorcism rites mainly for self gain and personal recognition.

Faith leaders are very powerful in our communities. It is important that we act to control the activities of unscrupulous individuals who are masquerading as "pastors" or "imams" and who do have vulnerable people attending their faith organizations and relying on them for spiritual support and guidance.

For this reason, while the report highlights the role of local safeguarding children's board in identifying and maintaining a database of faith organisations, we are disappointed that the report did not go as far as highlighting the need to monitor or vet the activities of such people to protect innocent families many of whom are experiencing extreme difficulties as newly arrived families in the country.

AFRUCA is calling for the establishment of a registration and monitoring system to regulate the faith sector and ensure anyone who wants to set up any place of worship is vetted to ensure they are fit to do so. We believe such a system should help to weed out unscrupulous persons and ensure they are fit to be spiritual leaders with responsibilities for vulnerable families and their children most of whom rely exclusively on their faith networks for support, help and assistance in settling into their lives in the country.

### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. AFRUCA – Africans Unite Against Child Abuse is the leading charity promoting the welfare and safeguarding needs of African children in the UK
2. AFRUCA took part in the Ministerial Round Table on Ritual Abuse in New Communities organized by Children’s Minister Beverley Hughes in July 2005 and is represented on the London Child Protection Committee Strategic Intelligence Group established as a result of the Round table.
3. As part of the activities marking its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary, AFRUCA is organizing a conference on “The Role of Faith Organisations in Safeguarding Children” on Thursday 6 July 2006. Details are available on our website at [www.afruca.org](http://www.afruca.org)
4. For further information and enquiries please contact Debbie Ariyo, AFRUCA Director on telephone 0207 704 2261 or mobile: 07947 996448

**ENDS**