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WE ARE NOT THE DEVILS CHILDREN BY ROBIN HAMMOND

NIGERIAS CHILD WITCHES

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We are not the devils children
Nigeria child witches
Photographer: Robin Hammond

In the south Eastern Nigerian state of Akwa Ibom children and babies are being branded as evil by evangelical pastors. Thousands are being abused, abandoned and even murdered while the preachers make money out of the fear of their parents and their communities.

Behind the smartly painted church doors these "Men of God" makes a living by 'deliverances' - exorcisms -for people beset by witchcraft, something seen to cause anything from divorce, disease, accidents to job losses. An exploitative situation has grown into something sinister as preachers are turning their attentions to children - naming them witches.

In a maddened state of terror, parents and whole villages turn on the child. They are bound, poisoned, slashed, chained to trees, buried alive or simply beaten and chased off into the bush. It is estimated that around 5000 children have been abandoned in this area since 1998 and many bodies have turned up in the rivers or in the forests. Many more are never found.

The more children a pastor declares witches, the more famous he gets and the more money he can make. Parents are asked for so much money that they will pay in instalments or perhaps sell their property.

While Nigeria's wealth is pumped out of oil and gas fields to bypass millions of its poorest people, tension and poverty has delivered an opportunity for new and terrible phenomenon being done in the name of 'Christianity.

Full text is available on request.

To help go to : www.stepsstonesnigeria.org

Stepping Stones Nigeria is dedicated to supporting the rights of vulnerable and exploited children, such as the so called 'child witches' and 'wizards' of the Niger Delta. Working with local community organizations, we deliver education, shelter, healthcare and hope for a brighter future. Through advocacy and research we passionately campaign at a local, national and international level to put a stop to the abuse of innocent children.

More pictures available at: www.bildbyransilver.se



Five year old twin boys Itohowo and Kufre were still hanging around close to their mother's shack, obvious malnourished, dressed in filthy rags. They had been sleeping in the market eating scraps of food off the ground. Approaching the boys brought a crowd of villagers, including their mother Imabong Etim Otoy who stood around shouting: 'Take them away from us, they are witches'. 'Take them away before they kill us all'. 'Witches!' We take the children away from their home and family. They get into the car without speaking, they do not cry and when we drive off they don't look back.



Sisters Victoria (4) and Helen (7) were both accused of being witches and abandoned by their parents. They were found living in the shell of an old building surviving off leaves and grass, too scared to leave the house. They now live at the house run by the Childs Right and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN), the only organisation providing a bed and safety for children accused of witchcraft. Such are the numbers coming to the organisation that they are often forced to make the kids share three to a bed. In the Nigerian State of Akwa Ibom children are being accused of witchcraft at an alarming rate.



Church goers give praise and are delivered from illness, sin, possession, and witchcraft at a church in Eket.

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Ekaete, mother to Mbet who she abandoned at six years old after the child was accused of being a witch.



Children at the house run by the Childs Right and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN), the only organisation providing a bed and safety for children accused of witchcraft. Such are the numbers coming to the organisation that they are often forced to make the kids share three to a bed.



Boys in Ibaka fishing village on the Niger Delta, fear for their lives. They are often beaten, even stabbed as happened to 12 year old Uwom (left) who was attacked with a machete. All of the other boys have suffered terrible beatings and stabbings. From left: Uwom (12), Samuel (13), Uno (14).



Boys in Ibaka fishing village on the Niger Delta, fear for their lives. They are often beaten, and even stabbed for being accused of being witches.



Church goers give praise and are delivered from illness, sin, possession, and witchcraft at a church in Eket.

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Chief Joe Inuaesiet from the village of Esit Eket. He is a firm critic of Pastors who accuse children of being witches and make money out of.

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16 year old Nwaeka had a large nail hammered into the top of her head by a complete stranger after being branded a witch. The attack left her brain damaged.

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Mary Sudnad, 10: ' My youngest brother died. The pastor told my mother it was because I was a witch'. Her mother threw boiling water and caustic soda over her head and body, and her father dumped his screaming daughter in a field. Mary was seven . She says she still doesn't feel safe . She says: ' My mother doesn't love me' . A tear streaks down her face.



Five year old twin boys Itohowo and Kufre, accused of witchcraft and abandoned by their mother Imabong Etim Otoyoy (centre) in a small village market after they were called witches.

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11 year old Mbet was abandoned by her mother when she was six after being accused of being a witch. She was lucky enough to be taken in as a house girl by a relative who didn't believe she was evil.