

## **Congolese Infants Raped in Black Magic Rituals**

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Superstitious beliefs said to be behind disturbing cases of sexual violence against young children.

Six children under the age of two have reportedly been raped or sexually molested in the Lubumbashi area, as part of apparent rituals in which the perpetrators believe they will acquire good fortune as result of the abuse.

The new cases come in the wake of a number of similar well documented incidents of sexual violence against infants over the last year, which have alarmed activists and sparked calls for the introduction of the death penalty for such offences.

A new police unit in Lubumbashi tasked with protecting women from sexual violence – which was set up four months ago – told IWPR about the latest cases, in which it said several of the victims were babies. It said it was aware of similar cases in other parts of the country.

Maurice Mulamba, a press officer for the child protection organisation PCPDE, an NGO that works in cooperation with UNICEF, the United Nations' child protection arm, described the incidents as “deplorable”.

“Sexual violence cases have taken a worrying turn in Lubumbashi,” he said. “One cannot deny what is happening.”

The child abuse reports have provoked outrage from women's groups who say perpetrators should face the death penalty.

Under Congolese law, the punishment for sexually abusing a child under the age of 17 is imprisonment of between seven and 20 years.

Mulamba says that, recently, a father was convicted of raping his eight-month old daughter, one of the six cases being dealt with by the new police unit.

He fled after committing the crime, but was arrested two weeks later after a friend, who knew where he was hiding, reported him to the police.

He was sentenced to the maximum jail term of 20 years.

Mulamba says superstitious beliefs are a chief reason for the newly reported crimes, with perpetrators apparently believing that sex with infants can bring about wealth and happiness.

This is also the view of Chantal Manda, the mother of a ten-month-old child who was raped by her husband in April 2009, an incident that at the time was widely reported by radio and television stations.

More than a year later, Manda recounted the story to IWPR.

“My husband used to dig for minerals in a quarry,” she said. “One evening, he came home saying he knew how we could get rich like our friends. He said I would have to let him sleep with our daughter. After the sexual intercourse, he said he would bring the blood to the soothsayer and we would get a lot of money.”

Manda says that she refused her husband's request. But she claims he raped their daughter when she left the house the following morning to go to the market.

“I didn't take long at the market,” she said. “When I came back, I found my child crying and my husband carrying her. I checked her diapers and saw she was bleeding.

“I called my mother who told me to take her to a doctor. Much to my surprise, he said the baby had been raped. I reported this to the police. My husband was arrested and is now serving his sentence in Kasapa prison.”

After he was arrested, the father, Augustin Ndambwe, spoke to the press and confessed to the crime.

“I saw a soothsayer who told me I would get a lot of money by taking the virginity of my child and bringing him the blood, which he would then use for magic,” he said. “It was my poverty that led me to act in this way.”

Gisèle Ngungwa, a Lubumbashi lawyer, confirmed that the explanation given by Ndambwe is common in cases where babies are raped.

"I have attended a dozen or so trials of this type, and perpetrators always said that they abused children on the advice of fetishists (witch doctors), who said the blood of babies would bring luck and happiness in their life," she said.

"We must work together in order to conduct a study about the appropriate sentences for sexual violence cases."

"How can we explain that an adult can rape a child younger than two?" asked Béatrice Kaind, a civil society activist. "It is diabolic. I think that the sentence of 20 years is not enough... I would suggest hanging. Perhaps one might say I am an extremist, but I don't see a sentence that could match the crime. Perpetrators of these crimes should be hanged in public."

Some have suggested that witch doctors who encourage the rape of babies should be tried along with the perpetrators, but lawyer Jérôme Itongo said that this couldn't happen under the current legal system.

"Fetishism (witchcraft) is not acknowledged by Congolese law," he explained. "It will be difficult to prove, according to the law, that fetishists lead perpetrators to commit these crimes. What is relevant for the judge is the actual act of sexual violence."

"To commit this crime, the perpetrator thought about it beforehand; he is responsible because he committed the crime."

There is widespread fear that, although such cases are coming to light, there are many more that go unreported.

Some believe that this sort of abuse has been happening for some time but is only now emerging because the authorities are stepping up efforts to protect women from sexual violence.

"This is not a new thing. It has been happening for a long time," said one woman who lives in Lubumbashi, but did not want her name to be used. "Currently, we know about it because it is getting publicity in the media. There are certainly other cases that are not known about and will never be known by the wider public."

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**Location:** [Democratic Republic of Congo](#)

**Topic:** [Children](#)

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