

Testimony Submitted to The Committee on Foreign Affairs,  
Subcommittee on  
Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations  
“Efforts to Address Ritual Abuse and Sacrifice in Africa”

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and

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First of all I would like to thank Chairman Congressman Chris Smith and Ranking Member Congresswoman Susan Wild, of the U.S. House of Representatives Global Health, Global Human Rights, International Organizations and other members of this Subcommittee for holding this very important hearing. I also want to publicly commend Congressman Smith for his tireless and unwavering efforts in seeking justice and accountability for countless victims of human rights violations from around the Globe. You provide a voice that otherwise would go unheard and a platform to those victims, who have suffered and continue to suffer with no one to turn to. Your steadfast support is globally recognized and very much needed in these troubled times we live in, and where so many atrocities are being committed around the world.

I am the Co-Executive Director for the Advocacy Foundation for Human Rights, a non-profit organization, located in Washington, DC. The Advocacy Foundation for Human Rights targets human rights violators, that engaged in public corruption and justice and accountability for the victims of such atrocities. We are actively engaged in conducting investigations and compiling information about those individuals who are committing ritualistic killings, especially in Liberia. The Foundation has received disturbing information about the frequency of such killings and the allegations linking it to the Executive Mansion (The Office of the President) and other high ranking government officials. Details of these atrocities are difficult to obtain.

Sources to the Foundation are endangered just by speakinmg out - and I will discuss this later in my testimomny.

Over the past 20 years I have been actively engaged in seeking justice and accountability for victims of human rights violations and conducting criminal investigations of war crimes and crimes against humanity on the continent of Africa, most specifically West Africa. During my last 3 years of Federal Law Enforcement service from July 2002-July 2005, I was detailed to the United Nations backed Special Court for Sierra Leone located in Freetown, Sierra Leone West Africa where I served as the Chief of Investigations. As Chief of Investigations of the Special Court for Sierra Leone I directed all criminal investigations which led to numerous indictments and convictions, most notably was former Liberian President Charles Taylor who was the first sitting Head of State to be indicted and convicted for war crimes and continues to serve his 50 year prison sentence.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone was established to investigate and prosecute those who bear the greatest responsibilty for the civil war in Sierra Leone, which lasted from March 1991 to January 2002 and resulted in the deaths of over 70,000 people. Our investigations led us to neighboring Liberia which had suffered two civil wars, the first from December 1989 to August 1997 and then again in 1999 to 2003 where over 250,000 Liberians were killed.

While serving as the Chief of Investigations I witnessed and investigated some of the most horrific and unspeakable human rights violations no one could ever imagine that someone could inflict on another human being. The horrors of civil war are always tragic, however, to see those involved in the commission of killing and torturing another human being by engaging in ritualistic activities was something I had not seen before and quite frankly prepared to deal with. Yet shortly after I arrived in Freetown, Sierra Leone I recall in August 2002 a news story where a 70 year old man seeking to become a Paramount Chief of a local Village, a political position in traditional system of local government and an integral element of governance, was convicted of a ritualistic killing. I learned quickly that ritualistic killings were common place, particularly in West Africa. This story reported the man seeking to become a Paramount Chief believed in black magic and in order to get elected he needed to sacrifice a young child and in this case he bought a 9-year old boy for 800,000 leones (\$160) from a family desperate for money.

Reportedly he gruesomely killed the 9 year old boy by slitting his throat and removing his liver and taking some blood to local witch doctors in the neighboring country of Guinea where they would use in making a liquid concoction he could drink and give him what is known as “Juju”. This was a term I learned later meant power and used in ritualistic killings by rebels fighting in the civil wars, both in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Suprisingly, I learned that ritual killings or human sacrifices to local deities were customary in parts of West Africa, where some people commission killings to obtain body parts for magic spells to gain political power and influence.

Early on during my criminal investigations of war crimes and crimes against in Sierra Leone I heard routinely about ritualistic killings involving the various rebel group and warring factions in Sierra Leone, which included the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the Civil Defense Force (CDF).

The war started in Kailahun, so we started our investigations in that part of the country where we uncovered numerous mass graves and in most cases the victims were civilians, including children. Their identities were mostly unknown, although some names were given. However, our witness interviews revealed that the RUF or RUF/AFRC were identified as the alleged perpetrator.

There were several causes of death of the victims reported including they were locked in houses and burnt, **“ritual human sacrifice for protection”** and gunshot and knife wounds. One of the witnesses interviews I recall involved a female RUF ex-child combatant, who advised that ritual killings were routinely practiced on enemy fighters or on civilians, including children. Sadly, the rebels from the various warring factions would boast about killing their enemy, many of which were young child soldiers, and eating their heart, drinking their blood, or eating other body parts claiming they received extra power from doing so.

This practice continues today in Sierra Leone and surges during election periods where people running for office believe that sacrificing a person, mostly younger boys and girls because it is believed the younger they are, the more power they get. The Voice of America (VOA) in Freetown in 2012 reported on the so-called ritual murders during election time and have been a part of African society for centuries. “In Sierra Leone, some believe ritual murders increase

during election time because some politicians think they will gain political power from another human's body parts.”

[Chief Minister, NaCSA Boss Indicted in Attempted Ritual Murder of Virgins Girls in Freetown \(sierraloade.sl\)](#)

In October 2021 a senior government official, who reported to the President of Sierra Leone was indicted for an attempted ritual murder of six “Virgin Girls” in Freetown. The Chief Minister in Sierra Leone has been accused of forcing a primary school teacher to kidnap six virgin schoolgirls for ritualistic purposes. Fortunately, the plot was foiled when one of the whistleblowers came forward and reported it to the police which led to the Chief Minister’s arrest and indictment. However, reportedly he was released from custody while the investigation continued and to date no prosecution has occurred.

Dr Fred P.M. VAN DER KRAAIJ, author of a blog known as [liberiapastandpresent.org](http://liberiapastandpresent.org), who lived and worked in Liberia as an Economist has chronicled a number of the ritualistic killings and other significant events in Liberia. In one of his blogs, he writes -- “Today's practice of ritual killings in Liberia - because it still exists! - mainly is a combination of traditional beliefs which inspire men-eating and modern-day criminal behavior of unscrupulous politicians who consider their ambitions worth more than the life of their victims. During the 14-year civil war (1989-2003) there were so many cases of gunmen - some of them child soldiers - eating their victim's hearts and other body parts that the Catholic Church issued a formal denunciation of these practices (Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, 1999: dust jacket). Liberia.”

It is well documented that during the civil wars in Liberia that ritual killings were commonplace and one of the most notorious rebels engaged in such horrific acts, is Milton Blahyi aka: **General Butt Naked**, a feared former Rebel Commander who fought in the Liberian civil war. He testified before the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) where he publicly stated “**I ate children's hearts,**” and admitted to taking part in human sacrifices as part of traditional ceremonies intended to ensure victory in battle. He also told BBC that his forces his forces had killed over 20,000 people.

During the first civil war (1989-1996) there were also other reports about Charles Taylor and his rebels accounts reportedly the formation of a group of cannibals called Top 20 of which he was a member. Reportedly the group, comprised of Taylor and 16 rebels of his own army

known as the National Patriotic Front for Liberia (NPFL) engaged in human sacrifices at Taylor's house.

On December 10, 2004, BBC publicly reported Hundreds of Liberian women had taken to the streets of the capital, Monrovia, protested against a recent wave of ritual killings. Bodies of children had been found with some of their organs missing, taken for what are viewed as magical properties. These killings were reportedly linked to politicians and the wealthy, who many believe to pay for the murders to increase their chances of good fortune.

There were other media reports documenting, including the Analyst, the discovery of the bodies of two unidentified children around the Du River area. One of the victims was a girl believed to be 12 years old. The media reports quoted eyewitnesses as saying that the body was discovered with "fresh blood coming from its mouth and nose."

The Ellen Johnson Sirleaf administration during her 12 years (2006-2018) in office was plagued with ritual killings and despite vows to bring them to an end they continued. The same problems continue under the Weah administration and unlike Sirleaf there were no insiders reporting her direct involvement with the ritual killings. However, we have received information that current administration has been linked to ritualistic killings of children. Sources advise the police are not allowed to investigate these matters or if they do, it is done superficially as to not get too close to those involved. Also, because of the high-level links to the government it is taboo to say anything about it or otherwise you could be the next victim.

One of the most notable allegations of ritualistic killings involve the mysterious disappearance of three young men who were hired by the Proprietor of the St. Moses Funeral Parlor to undertake a task in Bong County. On October 17, 2020, Robert M. Blamo, Jr, 29, Siafa Gbana Boimah, 34, and Bobby S. Gbeanquoi, 32, were reported drowned in a river in Fuama district, lower Bong County when a canoe they were allegedly riding capsized while returning to their respective homes. They were reportedly contracted to do a "piece of job" at the Oriental mining company owned and operated by Mr. Moses H. Ahossouhe (Proprietor of St. Moses Funeral Parlour), and one Mr. Abraham S. Samuels. It was reported by Mr. Ahoussouhe that the three young men drowned. The bodies were retrieved by Mr. Ahoussouhe and never returned to the parents. He has close ties to the President and the Government of Liberia (GOL), through the Ministry of Justice has failed to provide an update or release the outcome of an investigative

report on circumstances that led to the conclusion they drowned. Why didn't they release the bodies to the family?

The aggrieved families believed that their children are being kept in a sacred place to be used for alleged "ritualistic purposes." The family members sought the assistance of the international community, including the US Embassy and the United Nations.

On December 10, 2021, the United Nations issued a public statement –“ A UN human rights expert today called on the Liberian Government to promptly investigate a series of killings that have occurred this year, some of which have reportedly been linked to ritualistic practices.”

At least 10 people have been killed in unclear circumstances in 2021, including five in September reportedly with suspected links to ritualistic practices or political motivations. According to information received by the *Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions, Morris Tidball-Binz*, three of the most recent victims were either former officials or had links to high profile former politicians.

Even a recent death of some young girls involved in political campaign event held by the CDC sparked outrage by the citizens and allegations their deaths were done for ritualistic reasons. The local headlines read - **Liberia – Citizens to President Weah: ‘No ritual can help you from leaving office after the elections.’**

On August 24, 2023, the New Dawn News reported Several residents of Montserrado County have told incumbent President George Manneh Weah that no amount of alleged human sacrifice, ritual, and money can prevent him and the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) from leaving office.

“We want to tell President Weah that no amount of human sacrifice, ritual, and money can help in this election,” potential voters said in Montserrado County.”

The foundation will continue to work on this issue and applauds the work of this Subcommittee and its members. We hope that this Hearing will shed a very bright light on a very dark issue plaguing many African countries and especially Liberia who experienced this despicable crime against humanity during war and peace, yet it doesn't stop. Those involved

need to be exposed and prosecuted for these heinous crimes. The killing must stop and hope your legislation can effect change and stop this madness once and for all.