

President Goodluck Ebele
Jonathan

Sunday, January 23, 2011
Aso Rock Villa
Abuja, Nigeria

Re: The abuse of the witch children of Akwa Ibom State

Dear Mr. Jonathan:

The Institute for Science and Human Values is an international organization devoted to the global advancement of science, reason, and humanist values. Naturally, we were appalled to hear how children accused of witchcraft in Akwa Ibom State are cast out of their families, beaten, tortured, maimed, and murdered. We were heartened to hear how Mr. Sam Itauma of Eket has been rescuing these abused and innocent children, otherwise left to fend for themselves, through the Child's Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN) center, which he established and affiliated with Stepping Stones of the U.K. Mr. Itauma has worked tirelessly to restore the rights of these children. We were again heartened to hear how Governor Godswill Akpabio, responding to Mr. Itauma, signed a Child Rights Law addressing the witch children problem in 2008 and even visited the CRARN center and donated money to the center after Henen Ukpabio of the Liberty Foundation Gospel Ministries and her henchmen illegally raided the center.

Matters have taken a dark turn since then. Ukpabin, who accuses children of witchcraft and promotes their abuse, has never been prosecuted under the Child Rights Law nor has she been prosecuted for her raid on CRARN. In two interviews with CNN in August 2010, Governor Akpabio denied the very existence of the accused witch children that he addressed in his legislation. Shortly thereafter, on local radio and TV, Governor Akpabio falsely accused CRARN and Stepping Stones of duping people for money and declared Mr. Itauma was wanted for unspecified crimes. Governor Akpabio ordered a police surveillance of CRARN. On 10 November 2010, the federal EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) raided the CRARN center on the basis of anonymous petitions and sought to arrest Mr. Itauma, who was not there, for unspecified crimes.

The Akwa Ibom State Commissioner for Information, Mr. Aniekan Umanah, publically threatened to dismantle CRARN using a government commission. Mr. Umanah also falsely accused Gary Foxcroft of Stepping Stones with child trafficking. The threatened government commission, charged with investigating CRARN and Stepping Stones, was established on 22 November 2010 with its members hand-picked by Gov. Akpabio's administration.

Mr. Itauma fears for his life. Mr. Foxcroft fears to go to Nigeria. The abused children at the CRARN center wonder what is going to happen to them.

One measure of the decency of a society, accepted throughout the world, is the way it treats its children. By that measure, the forces of darkness and superstition are destroying the children of Akwa Ibom, and the government is in the lead

We call upon you to:

- Commence immediate enforcement of the Child's Rights Law when and where applicable.
- Commence an immediate and ongoing government funded education and awareness campaign to educate communities in Akwa Ibom State against superstitious beliefs in child witchcraft.
- Cease all hostile actions, threats, and petitions against Mr. Itauma, CRARN, Stepping Stones or Mr. Foxcroft. Order the Akwa Ibom State Government to cease negative media campaigns against CRARN and/or its agents.
- Guarantee that all persons living or working at CRARN Center will not be harassed, kidnapped or murdered. Ensure complete stoppage of unlawful entry by law-enforcement agents into the CRARN Compound.
- Provide qualified and paid onsite medical personnel for medical emergencies, first aids, evaluations, and hospital referrals at the CRARN Center.
- Commence immediate and extensive investigation of the role of Helen Ukpabio's organization and other such organizations whose practices and beliefs foster child endangerment due to stigmatization of children as witches. Full criminal prosecution of those found complicit in such practices should follow this investigation.
- Commence immediate investigation of Governor Godswill Akpabio's administration for child endangerment due to their failure to effectively enforce the Child's Rights Law, and for their harassment and intimidation of the children's advocates.

It is a matter of human decency.

Sincerely yours,
Paul Kurtz, Chairman

Stuart Jordan, President