

**PRESS RELEASE BY
COALITION AGAINST WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATION (CAWA)**

**CONVICTION OF AKUA DENTEH'S KILLERS AND THE NEED TO
PASS THE ANTI-WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATION BILL CURRENTLY
LANGUISHING IN PARLIAMENT**

Introduction

This coming Sunday, July 23rd, marks exactly three years since Madam Akua Denteh was brutally lynched in Kafaba, near Salaga in the Savana Region. To mark the third anniversary of this tragic incident that severely marred Ghana's reputation internationally, the Coalition Against Witchcraft Accusation (CAWA) would like to address the recent incidents related to witchcraft accusations, and the conviction and sentencing of the two women directly involved in the tragic lynching of Akua Denteh. These incidents highlight the urgent need for legislation and a coordinated response to combat the ongoing social menace of witchcraft accusations, which primarily targets older and vulnerable women.

Witchcraft Accusations is a Life Sentence

Witchcraft accusations result in a life sentence of stigma and discrimination. Once accused, individuals bear this burden for the rest of their lives. Witchcraft accusations extend beyond an individual's lifetime; they become a generational sentence. The daughters of those accused are likely to face similar accusations. The extremely harmful practice of witch-hunting and witchcraft accusations tears families apart, endangers social cohesion, creates orphans needlessly, and forces vulnerable women away from their homes, loved ones, children, and grandchildren, often into exploitative and abusive camps in the Northern regions.

The Deadly Consequences

Recent incidents have highlighted the deadly consequences of witchcraft accusations. In May 2023, we witnessed the horrifying case in Zakpalsi, a farming community in the Mion District in the Northern region, where a woman in her early 40s and a man were accused, pursued by the community's youth, and brutally lynched at the chief's palace and residence respectively. While the media initially brought attention to this case, it has since faded with the headlines, leaving the Ghanaian public in the dark about any progress on the investigation by the police. The half-hearted responses by the security forces and justice system to witchcraft accusations are as troubling as the accusations and attacks themselves.

Concerns with the Conviction and Sentence

The recent judgment regarding the lynching of Madam Akua Denteh in July 2020 brought both satisfaction and disappointment. While we were pleased with the conviction and sentencing of the two women involved, we were disheartened that they each received a 12-year sentence and may even serve far fewer years in prison. It is very concerning that taking someone's life may result in such a relatively lenient sentence within our criminal justice system, especially for the vulnerable and voiceless like Akua Denteh.

Additionally, we find it disturbing that only two women were held accountable, despite there being a group of men present who actively encouraged and facilitated the act. The responsibility for overseeing and perpetuating the belief in witchcraft primarily lies with men, yet they escaped accountability. Obviously, the women were convicted of manslaughter since they were those directly involved in beating the old lady. The men who accused the victim of being a witch and dragged her out of her home, and cheered her lynching, got away with it because there is no law against witchcraft accusations in Ghana. But there would be no lynching without accusations!

The Urgent Need for the Law

These issues underscore the critical need for the anti-witchcraft accusation law. The bill has undergone initial processes and is currently ready for presentation in parliament. However, it languishes in the files, awaiting to be laid before the house, read, voted upon, and passed into law. CAWA wants to know why the bill seems to be pushed aside. How many more women victims does parliament need to take action on the bill? We understand that passing the bill will not eradicate witchcraft accusations instantly, but it will pave the way for education and a change in attitudes and mindsets over time. Enacting this law will provide victims wasting their lives in the camps with confidence and the security they need to return to their homes.

Call to Action

We, therefore, call upon Ghanaian society to rise and demand that the parliament, especially the Speaker, to lay the anti-witchcraft accusation Bill for second reading and passing into law. This parliament has an extraordinary opportunity to make history, and we implore them not to let this opportunity slip by. The Coalition Against Witchcraft Accusation will continue to advocate tirelessly to ensure the bill does not end up in the dustbin of forgotten bills. By passing the law, we will safeguard the lives and dignity of countless innocent individuals, promote social harmony, and demonstrate our commitment to justice and equality for all. Let us unite in this cause to bring an end to this deeply entrenched social menace.

SIGNED BY CAWA MEMBERS:

1. The Sanneh Institute
2. Songtaba
3. Women International League for Peace and Freedom, Ghana
4. ActionAid Ghana
5. Legal Resource Centre
6. Amnesty International, Ghana

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