

## Rights Groups Sue Tanzania Government Over Albino Deaths

Written by Rudi Prinsloo  
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Tanzanian rights groups are suing the government for failure to protect albinos, who have been targeted in a string of witchcraft-related murders, courts officials said Saturday.

In a constitutional petition filed with the High Court here late Friday by the Tanzania Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) and Tanzania Albino Society (TAS), the government was also asked to compensate the victims' families.

Lawyer Fulgence Massawe said in a statement to the court that the petitioners were not satisfied that the Tanzanian government had taken adequate measures to protect albinos.

"We are asking the court to order the government to put in place decisive measures to protect the lives and dignity of albinos," he said.

Since the start of 2008, at least 45 albinos have been slaughtered in Tanzania. Their limbs and organs are sold for thousands of dollars to witch doctors who use them to concoct lucky charms.

Albino bones, hair and skin are used by some witch doctors to divine for minerals in the soil or included in rituals meant to bring wealth and luck.

Despite a number of arrests, the Tanzanian authorities have failed to dismantle a trade which has begun to spill over the country's borders.

At least 10 albinos have been murdered and dismembered in neighbouring Burundi and their parts smuggled into Tanzania over the past few months.

Albinism prevalence is high in the east African country and albinos in remote rural regions live in fear with no means to protect themselves.

"We also want albinos to be ensured access to skin health services in hospitals and measures that will help fight stigma on albinos," Massawe said.

Albinism is a congenital lack of the melanin pigment in the skin, eyes and hair which protects from the sun's ultraviolet rays. Albinos are vulnerable to medical complications and social discrimination in Africa.

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