

WEEKEND LIFE

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Inside Bauchi's deadly witchcraft trials

Witchcraft accusations have continued to fuel jungle justice in Bauchi State, with elderly women and vulnerable individuals often the targets of mob violence. In the most recent case, a septuagenarian, Talatu Joshua, was lynched in Kirfi Local Government Area after being accused of practicing witchcraft. DAVID ADENUGA writes on the disturbing pattern.

• The 20-year-old woman, Rakiya Ya'u

• Catechist Kefas Dennis

WHEN 70-year-old Talatu Joshua left her home for church on March 2, she had no idea it would be her last day at St. Benedict Catholic Church in Kurba, Kirfi Local Government Area, Bauchi State. But the elderly woman met her tragic end that day, ambushed by four young men who accused her of witchcraft.

The assailants—Rilwanu Usman, Ali Isa, Ila Alhaji Marafa and Jamilu Malam Usman—were said to have ambushed the elderly woman inflicting multiple injuries, including a severe wound beneath her left ear.

The widow was rushed to the General Hospital in Kirfi, where she was later pronounced dead.

According to the spokesperson of the Bauchi State Police Command, CSP Ahmed Wakil, following an investigation, the command arrested the four suspects on March 8, 2025, and detained them at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for further questioning.

He further said that the attack was reportedly triggered by a traditional healer's claim that Talatu was responsible for the illness of Ramatu Yusuf, the wife of one of the suspects.

Acting on this accusation, the suspects allegedly confronted Talatu, accused her of witchcraft and attacked her with sticks, leading to her death.

But Talatu's son, Johanna Haruna, in an interview with our correspondent, said the witchcraft allegation leveled against his mother was not true.

Narrating the incident culminated in his mother's death, he said: "On March 2, 2025, I had just returned home when my son, Kefas, came running to me. He told me that grandma had been

beaten and was lying on the roadside.

"I asked him who attacked her, and he said Rilwanu, Ali, Jamilu and Sama'ila. Without hesitation, I took him on my bike to the location. I had hoped to find her alive when I got there, but she was already gone.

"Devastated, I immediately called the police in Kirfi and reported the incident to Inspector Jerry. He assured me they were on their way.

"I carried her back home in tears, waiting for help. When the police finally arrived, they took photographs of her body and filed a report.

"They said they would return the next day, but by the next morning, no one showed up, and her body had already started to decompose.

"I called Inspector Jerry again, asking what I should do. He told me they had completed their report and that we could proceed with the burial.

"Heartbroken, I reached out to our pastor, who came to lead us in prayers and oversee the burial rites."

A chronicle of killings

Our correspondent reports that the recent incident echoed a similar one in November last year when a woman orchestrated her father-in-law's murder over witchcraft accusations.

The 20-year-old woman, Rakiya Ya'u, from Wuro Dangogo in Misau Local Government Area, was arrested for allegedly orchestrating the murder of her father-in-law, Damina Lamba.

Believing he practised witchcraft and was responsible for her son's death the previous year, she hired two men, Abdu Lamba and Ruwa Aliyu, to carry out the killing.

The victim was found lifeless with head injuries in a bush between Wuro Dangogo and Sarma villages.

In yet another case, two men accused of witchcraft were arrested over the alleged murder of their uncle Ezekiel Samaila. The suspects, Ezekiel Simon, 18, and Lumana Zakka, 29, were arrested by the police for the alleged murder of Samaila.

A statement issued by the spokesman of the Police Command, Ahmed Mohammed Wakil revealed that Samaila, 45, was last seen on September 24, 2024, when he left his house to watch a football game.

His body was found the next day along a roadside, and his motorcycle and phone were missing. Operatives of the Police Command launched an investigation and arrested Ezekiel Simon after finding Samaila's phone in his possession.

Simon was said to have confessed during interrogation that he and Zakka killed Samaila by hitting him with a pestle.

Zakka said he killed Samaila in revenge, accusing him of causing the deaths of his family members, including his mother, two sisters and two daughters.

According to the statement, the police recovered Samaila's phone and discovered the suspects had sold his motorcycle for N400,000.

The pain of burying one of my own - Catechist

The Catechist of St. Benedict Catholic Church in Kurba, Kirfi Local Government Area, Kefas Dennis, could not

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hide his anger as he narrated how he buried Talatu Joshua, one of his church members.

He said: "When the police gave the go-ahead for her burial, I took it upon myself to lay her to rest, but my heart was heavy with unanswered questions.

"Why did it take six days for justice to begin? Why did an innocent woman have to die this way?"

Giving his own account of the incident, Kefas recalled that it occurred at about 4pm on March 2. According to him, the son of the deceased had called to inform him of the tragic incident.

He said: "I advised him to report it to the police, and he did. At the time, I was in Bauchi for a programme.

"I later learnt that the woman was attacked while on her way home. The police arrived at the scene around 7 PM, conducted their investigation, and took photographs of her remains.

"The next day, the deceased's son contacted the police again for further action, but they told him to proceed with the burial, assuring him there was no issue.

"I was the one who buried her, surrounded by her children and the traditional leader of the area.

"Before the burial, I personally contacted the police again to confirm their approval.

"Later that evening, I went to the police station with the deceased's son to ask about the next steps, as no arrests had been made.

"The officers assured us that investigations were ongoing and urged us to be patient.

"The police responded that, based on their experience, they would continue tracking the suspects rather than detaining their family members.

"To prevent further unrest, I urged the Christian community in the area to remain calm and allow the security agents to handle the matter.

"I also reported the incident to our reverend father, who gathered the people of the community and advised us all to embrace peace and let the authorities do their work.

"Six days after the incident, the suspects were finally arrested. When I visited the police station, I confirmed their detention."

Three of four suspects in tragic killing released, lawyer alleges

Although the Bauchi State Police Command confirmed the arrest of four suspects linked to the death of Talatu, a WhatsApp message sent to our correspondent by ADA-LIGHT KWALTINGS, SAMUEL & PARTNERS, the complainant concerning the murder of Mama Talatu, alleged that three of the suspects were released after the police charged them with criminal conspiracy.

The complainant, Barrister C.Y Kwaltings Esq, in a text sent to our correspondent, said the three suspects denied the allegations but admitted they were present at the scene, claiming they didn't harm the victim.

"This charge seems flawed—conspiracy to commit what exactly? The three suspects were taken to a magistrate court and granted bail, which is deeply troubling," she stated.

But the police said the four suspects had been charged to court.

When contacted, Wakil, in a WhatsApp message sent to our correspondent stated that three of the suspects, Samaila Usman, 19, Rilwanu Usman, 24, and Ali Isah, 25, were charged to court for criminal conspiracy with intent to commit an offence punishable under section 97 of Bauchi State penal code law 2022 they were convicted.

On his part, Jamilu Usman, a 25-year-old, would be charged on a motion to exonerate sec 304 of the administration of criminal justice law of Bauchi State (ACJL).

Bauchi Chief Judge laments



• The Founder of the Advocacy for Alleged Witches (AfAW) Dr. Leo Igwe



• Johanna Haruna

rising cases of witchcraft

Meanwhile, the Chief Judge of Bauchi State, Justice Rabi Talatu Umar, has raised the alarm over the increasing number of cases involving witchcraft, describing it as a persistent challenge in legal jurisprudence.

She stated this while reviewing the cases of awaiting trial inmates at Jama'are Maximum Correctional Centre during a two-day quarterly routine visit by the Administration of Justice Committee, which she chaired last month.

Justice Rabi Talatu Umar cautioned judicial officers against entertaining cases related to witchcraft, describing them as difficult to prove and lacking concrete evidence.

Speaking during the two-day review of awaiting trial cases at the Jama'are Maximum Correctional Centre, Justice Umar emphasised that witchcraft allegations are often baseless and should not be taken seriously in court unless the accused confesses.

"If you are not a witch, you cannot know who is a witch. It is an issue that could hardly be established unless the witch confesses to be one," she said.

She warned that allowing such cases into the judicial system could undermine the credibility of the courts and lead to wrongful convictions.

"Judicial officers must focus on cases with substantial evidence rather than entertain accusations that cannot be proven beyond reasonable doubt."

"If you are not a witch, you cannot identify one. It is an issue that is difficult to prove unless the accused confesses," she added.

Activist condemns witchcraft killings, calls for stronger law

enforcement

The Founder of the Advocacy for Alleged Witches (AfAW), Dr. Leo Igwe, has condemned the brutal killing of the elderly woman accused of witchcraft, describing it as an example of "the level of jungle justice in the country."

In a WhatsApp chat with our correspondent he decried the absence of the state in the lives of citizens, arguing that such killings occur because people take the law into their own hands.

"In a situation where the state is very present and active in the lives of citizens, the fears that lead to this brutal killing may have been addressed by the state.

"The absence of the state in the life of people makes them take the law into their own hands and resort to their own way of making sense of this misfortune," he stated.

Igwe warned that the case is not the only incident, pointing out a disturbing pattern of witchcraft accusations leading to violence.

He said: "This particular incident was not the first and may not actually be the last.

"There has been an existing pattern where people find somebody whom they claim to be responsible for their misfortune and take action.

"There has not been any effort to address this trend, and that is why the woman eventually became a casualty," He said.

The activist stressed the need for authorities to take decisive action against perpetrators to break this cycle of violence.

"Immediately the state is able to rise up to the occasion, punish the perpetrators and send a strong deterrent message, this pattern would be broken. Justice would be served,

"The 20-year-old woman, Rakiya Ya'u, from Wuro Dangogo in Misau Local Government Area, was arrested for allegedly orchestrating the murder of her father-in-law, Damina Lamba"



• Ezekiel Simon, 18, (right) and Lumana Zakka

and we will not be seeing much of this," he said.

This was as he expressed deep sorrow over the killing, particularly because elderly people, who have contributed to society, deserve care rather than violent accusations.

Igwe said: "It is always unfortunate to hear that elderly women and men are brutally killed this way.

"People who are old deserve love and care from the society they have served.

"Instead of society being there for them, they frame them, accuse them of something they didn't do, and end their lives in a tragic manner.

"It is shocking, heartbreaking, and frightening for every member of society who aspires to grow old."

He also highlighted the failure of law enforcement agencies in addressing these crimes.

He said: "The problem is not the absence of laws but their enforcement.

"Witchcraft accusation is a crime under Nigerian law.

"There are legal provisions against jungle justice, child witch accusations, and human rights mechanisms that prohibit torture and degrading treatment.

"Yet, police and other government agencies are selective in enforcement.

"Only in a few cases—when there is significant pressure—do they take action."

He cited recent cases of successful prosecutions in Kano and Cross River states but noted that in many instances, families of accused persons face pressure to withdraw cases.

"Largely, when these cases get to court, pressure is brought to bear on the accused and their families, compelling them to withdraw the cases or seek an out-of-court settlement," Igwe said.

The activist emphasised that rather than introduce new laws, the focus should be on enforcing existing ones.

He said: "What we need now is enforcement. The laws are there, but what is lacking is the political will to enforce them.

"The society needs to be educated so that accused persons know they are protected by law and can demand justice.

"Law enforcement agencies must rise to their duties without demanding mobilization fees, which make it impossible for the poor to seek justice."

He also criticized the sentiments within the police force, stating that some officers' personal beliefs in witchcraft hinder justice.

"Many police officers believe that accused persons could actually be witches, making them reluctant to intervene.

"This, coupled with corruption and the demand for mobilization fees, has made it difficult to tackle the issue effectively," Igwe argued.

He called for urgent reforms in policing and governance to protect vulnerable individuals from witchcraft-related violence.