

# THE KILLINGS IN CROSS RIVER

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## **This is the age of enlightenment. The killers should be brought to justice**

The recent tragedy in Cross River State in which no fewer than a dozen persons were set ablaze over allegations of witchcraft is a sad reminder of how deep-rooted superstition has become in our country. According to reports, a political appointee in the state, accompanied by some young men, stormed Oku community in Boki Local Government Area and set ablaze about 12 persons alleged to be witches and wizards. These innocent citizens were reportedly brought out of their homes and burnt alive. The survivors were also denied medical treatment following a threat by the leader of the killer gang that anyone who offered them medical attention would also suffer similar fate.

This callous act of unscrupulous men waking up from their beds in 21st century Nigeria, moving from house to house and carrying out blatant acts of murder without being challenged is totally unacceptable and must be duly punished. It is more disheartening that public officers could have the audacity to take laws into their hands, condemn people to death and carry out the execution. This political appointee was said to have been accompanied by some youths, one of whom was said to be using a mirror to show who was a witch or wizard and had to be destroyed.

More disturbing is that cases like these have become prevalent in the South-south, particularly in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, where people have over the years cultivated the habit of unjustly accusing their neighbours of witchcraft after which they mete out jungle justice. We therefore challenge both Governor Ben Ayade and the Cross River State Police Commissioner to immediately fish out these murderers and promptly bring them to justice. Only deliberate punishment for this callous act can serve as a deterrent to others.

However, there is also a challenge that we must deal with. Given the nature of our society, people usually reduce things they don't understand to 'spiritual attacks', 'witchcraft,' etc., and

such labelling and embellishments often push them to seek false solutions. Leo Igwe, President of the Advocacy for Alleged Witches (AfWA), who named the principal suspect in the tragic incident explained how “some traditional priests claim they can look into the occult world using a mirror to find answers and solutions to individual and community problems.” He added that these supposedly spiritually powerful persons are usually invited to point out witches and wizards and other evil persons in their families. “They usually place the mirror in front of any suspect or ask the person to look into it as they try to certify if the person is evil or not. These charlatans are hired and paid huge sums of money to come and identify witches and wizards.”

While we therefore condemn the Cross River State killings, there is also a need for a sustained sensitisation of Nigerians, especially in rural areas, on the dangers posed not only by jungle justice but also by a retrogressive belief system that has no regard for human lives. This tragic episode is a throwback to the primitive age when might was right and stronger personalities oppressed the weak and vulnerable in the society. We hope that the authorities in Cross River State will join hands with the security agencies to fish out the principal character in this most heinous crime and all his collaborators after which they must be brought to book for this depraved social behaviour.

In all, we strongly voice our opposition to the spate of indiscriminate killings. Nigerians should seriously work against any form of bestiality that portrays this nation in bad light before the international community. We are not a nation of sadists and savages.

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