**The Situation of Children with Albinism in Côte d'Ivoire: Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child**

**Joint Submission of:**

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* This report is respectfully submitted by the NGO Under the Same Sun with the support of the NGO Bien- être des albinos de Côte d'Ivoire BEDACI, regarding the concluding observations prior to reporting for the committee on the rights of the child concerning the situation of children with albinism in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire.

1. **QUESTIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE**

**Non-discrimination (on the basis of disability)**

* What measures have you put in place to effectively raise awareness on discrimination, exclusion, stigma and bullying against children with albinism in Côte d’Ivoire?
* What measures have you put in place to ensure children with albinism have access to reasonable accommodation necessary to access education and remove them from poverty?
* What measures have you put in place to end discrimination including bullying which children with albinism face at various levels of society: family, school, society, in the republic of Côte d’Ivoire?

**Right to Life, Survival and Development**

* What measures have you put in place to prevent attacks on children with albinism which are often related to manifestation of belief in witchcraft?
* What measures have you put in place to ensure children with albinism have access to health services particularly sunscreen lotions and other sun protective gear since skin cancer tends to ravage this group of people in the country?

1. **WHAT IS ALBINISM?**

* Albinism is a relatively rare, non-contagious, genetically inherited condition characterized by a lack of pigmentation in the hair, skin and eyes. It occurs regardless of ethnicity or gender. Both parents must carry the gene for it to be passed on, even if neither have albinism themselves. In Africa, estimates on the incidence of albinism range from 1 in 5,000 to 1 in every 15,000. In some populations in the region, it may be as high as 1 in 1,000.[[1]](#footnote-1) There are no up-to-date reliable statistics on the number of persons with albinism in Côte d'Ivoire.
* Almost everyone with albinism is visually impaired. The majority are “legally blind” and very sensitive to light. Eyeglasses can only partially correct this impairment. While most can read large print and do not require Braille, they often cannot see the blackboard in a regular classroom setup. In most cases, structural barriers prevent full participation in society on an equal basis with others in a manner proscribed by the CRPD.
* With no melanin or pigment for protection, their skin burns immediately in the sun. Most Africans including Ivorians with albinism have severely sun-damaged skin, often bearing dramatic, visible skin damage at an early age.[[2]](#footnote-2) Fatal skin cancer often ravages and claim the vast majority of persons with albinism in Sub Saharan Africa the age of 40. We have little reason to believe that this Côte d'Ivoire is an exception. There is little awareness of the need for sun protection and sunscreen is not commonly available or affordable. The right to the highest attainable standard of health as prescribed by the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights and reiterated by the CRC is not generally not met for Ivorians with albinism.

1. **ALBINISM IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE**

* In Côte d'Ivoire, children with albinism are often subject to discrimination, bullying and stigmatization. Violence against children with albinism motivated by manifestation of belief in witchcraft has been reported in the country. This includes cases of abduction, killing and rape.
* The organization Bien-être des albinos de Côte d’Ivoire (Albinos Welfare of Côte d’Ivoire) (BEDACI) informed the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Côte d’Ivoire of the various problems encountered by some 4,000 Ivorians with albinism who face social and cultural rejection including children. BEDACI complained that ill-treatment of persons with albinism had become commonplace and widespread, with several cases of kidnapping reported. According to BEDACI, a woman sentenced to 5 years of prison for kidnapping child with albinism was reportedly released after 8 months.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* The dropout rate was higher for children with albinism than for the rest of the population, in particular owing to stigmatization and vision impairment for which there was no accommodation. Eighty per cent of persons with albinism were from poor families. The Independent Expert noted, however, that Côte d’Ivoire on 21 June 2013 adopted a law for the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. He hoped that specific measures will be adopted to take into account the specific needs of persons with albinism in respect of health, education and access to the labour market, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 23/13 of 13 June 2013 on attacks and discrimination against persons with albinism.[[4]](#footnote-4)
* Cases of abandonment of children with albinism due to erroneous beliefs surrounding albinism, are not uncommon in the country.[[5]](#footnote-5)
* Skin cancer due to daily sun exposure without sun protective gear including sunscreen lotions (unaffordable to the families of those children when they are available) remains a key problem faced by children with albinism.

1. **KEY ISSUES IN HUMN RIGHTS RE CHILDREN WITH ALBINISM IN COTE D’IVOIRE**

**Right to Life and Security of Person**

* In Côte d'Ivoire, there have been thirty ritual attacks recorded. Out of this total, fifteen were cases involving children. These include killings (9 cases), missing (4 cases), abandonment of children (2 cases) and other cases are of survivors of various forms of violence.[[6]](#footnote-6) This is part of a wider pattern of murders and attacks across Africa. Since 2010, there have been 582 cases of attacks on persons with albinism. According to data provided by the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, the number is closer to 700. The cases are from 28 countries and include killings, mutilations, abductions, trafficking in persons and body parts, mutilations, rapes and grave robberies for body parts.[[7]](#footnote-7) These are reported cases only. The actual incidence of attacks is predicted generally believed, by UTSS and other NGOs, to be much higher, given that there are no robust mechanisms of monitoring in every country. Moreover, ritual attacks like these based on manifestation of belief in witchcraft, are often shrouded in secrecy, and sometimes involve family members. These attacks are fueled by a demand for the body parts. It has been reported by the International Federation of the Red Cross, in an advocacy report, that corpses of persons with albinism can be worth up to $75,000 US.

Cases in Detail:

We have concealed the identity of victims by their initials for their own (and their family’s) safety).

* In May of 1991, AD, a 16-year-old teenage boy with albinism narrowly escaped abduction at the Lycée Sainte Therese of Koumassi in Abidjan. A man in a 4x4 vehicle with dark tinted windows was attempting to solicit AD to get into his vehicle under the pretence of trying to find the Mayor’s office. As he was about to climb into the vehicle AD says “My life was saved by a woman who shouted at me from across the street, warning me to flee and not get in.”[[8]](#footnote-8)
* In 2008 - UNPOL and the Regional Human Rights Office in Bouaké were investigating allegations of the abduction of three-year-old twin boys with albinism in the Dar-es-Salaam neighborhood. The mother of the twins told UNPOL that, six armed individuals dressed in military uniforms burst into her bedroom and forced her to give them her children. UNPOL and the Human Rights Office have brought the matter to the attention of the Forces Nouvelles authorities.[[9]](#footnote-9)
* On September 08, 2008, a 4-year-old boy with albinism by the name of OA was murdered and his body parts removed in the town of Guitry not far from Lakota in the South-West of Côte d'Ivoire.[[10]](#footnote-10)
* In mid-July of 2010 a 3-year-old boy with albinism was brutally murdered in a village called Pinhou, in the subprefecture of Bangolo- region of Man, in the western part of Côte d'Ivoire. The child was abducted by 2 men who attempted to hide the lifeless and beheaded body of the boy in a tree. During a police investigation the men were arrested as they were trying to remove the baby’s body from the trunk of the tree. On October 2010, Samba Moussa, the child’s father, was convicted of the murder of his son for ritual purposes. He was sentenced to 4 years in prison.[[11]](#footnote-11)
* On March 12, 2011, at around 8 PM, a 9-year-old boy with albinism by the name KD, was kidnapped in the area “Gobelet” in the town of Cocody in Abidjan. A credible source, a resident who witnessed the incident, informed UTSS that he saw a man introducing the boy into his vehicle. The witness added that as he was himself hiding, he could neither give the alert nor rescue the boy for fear to being killed himself. To date, we have no news of the boy except that some investigation was launched.[[12]](#footnote-12)
* On March 19, 2011, at round 11:35 AM, a 12- year- old girl with albinism by the name of M, living in the town of Koumassi in the area of the Mosque, escaped an abduction by two individuals. She had been beaten and some locks from her hair had been removed. M was rescued by one of her neighbors who intervened by chasing away the attackers.[[13]](#footnote-13)
* On April 03, 2011, after the curfew imposed by the authorities in Abidjan, in the town of Port-Bouët, a 14-year-old boy with albinism by the name of KA was kidnapped. Authorities were informed of his disappearance.[[14]](#footnote-14)
* On Saturday, October 1, 2011, a 4-year-old girl with albinism by the name MK, from Côte d'Ivoire, was granted political asylum along with her parents in Israel. The Population and Immigration Authority's Refugee Agency's Refugee Status Determination Unit received MK's request for asylum and subsequently found evidence indicating she could fall victim to body-part traders. The unit recommended to Israel’s Minister of Interior that the family be granted asylum in Israel to which he agreed.[[15]](#footnote-15)
* On Tuesday, July 03, 2012, a young boy with albinism by the name of MS (18), apprentice tailor at the big market of Toumodi (Centre of Côte d'Ivoire), was accosted by three individuals who tried to persuade him into their vehicle. Sensing that something was wrong, his refusal resulted in a violent quarrel attracting the attention of passers-by. The vehicle and the three people were delayed by the rapidly growing crowd. Alerted, the police arrived. The young man and his three potential abductors were taken to the police station. Four people (the 3 kidnappers plus the alleged buyer) appeared before the Toumodi’s Criminal Court on Thursday, July 19, to answer for the crime of attempted kidnapping. They were all sentenced to five years in prison.[[16]](#footnote-16)
* In September of 2012 a 3-year-old child with albinism survived an attempted abduction in the region of Man in the west of the country.[[17]](#footnote-17)
* On Thursday afternoon, May 30, 2013, a young boy with albinism vanished in the town of Koumassi, in Abidjan, while his mother had become preoccupied in the marketplace. After several minutes of calling and screaming, onlookers helped them trace the child to a taxi where the little boy was found unharmed inside. Unable to explain himself, the alleged kidnapper was severely beaten by one of the security guards in the market and was seen leaving the area covered in blood.[[18]](#footnote-18)
* On June 14, 2013, in the town of Toumodi, in the Centre of Côte d'Ivoire, a 7-year-old boy with albinism by the name of S, was walking near his home when a shopkeeper asked him to stop. While pretending to give the boy some milk the shopkeeper withdrew a pair of scissors and attempted to cut the child’s hair. Fortunately, a family friend saw the incident and reported it to police. The perpetrator was arrested and held in custody for 3 days before being released. He was held in custody that long because he was unable to convince the police of pure intentions for cutting off the child’s hair.[[19]](#footnote-19)
* On Sunday, July 12, 2015, the body of an unidentified boy with albinism estimated by police to be 6 or 7 years of age was found with half his hair removed in Yopougon (in the outskirts of Abidjan). His body was found by residents of the ward who reported the incident to police. The case is complicated according to police since the body showed no signs of violence. Also, the child’s disappearance was not reported by the parents, so the police decided to start investigations.[[20]](#footnote-20)
* On June 30, 2017, the lifeless body of a 3-year-old boy with albinism by the name of SO was found in a 1- meter-deep abandoned well situated behind the town hall of Kani, in the ward of Damasso, in the north west of Côte d'Ivoire. According to first testimonies gathered by Mamidou Coulibaly, founder and chairperson of the NGO, BEDACI, this case was not an accident, and it appeared – based on the ongoing history and patterns of attacks on children with albinism - the boy was likely murdered for ritual purposes and subsequently thrown in the abandoned well.[[21]](#footnote-21)

1. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Protection, Prevention and Accountability**

* The Government of Côte d'Ivoire should take concrete steps to prevent and protect children with albinism from ritual attacks and other harmful practices related to witchcraft.
* The Government of Côte d'Ivoire should bring all cases of attacks to their logical conclusion in the court of law and publicize the findings with victims and their family members as well as NGOs promoting the rights of persons with albinism.
* The Government of Côte d'Ivoire should implement the regional action plan to end attacks and related violations against persons with albinism as adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights through Resolution 373. That resolution calls on all member States of the African Union to adapt and implement the measures in the regional action plan.

**Education**

* The government of Côte d'Ivoire should provide reasonable accommodation for vision impairment for all students with albinism including adaptive devices such as monocular, glasses and magnifiers as well as large print texts. This will enable access to education and lower school dropout among students with albinism.
* The government of Côte d'Ivoire should carry out specific measures particularly in training educators and teachers on responding to the needs of learners with albinism. Sample training manual is here[[22]](#footnote-22)

**Health**

* The government of Côte d'Ivoire should integrate in the health care system specific measures that will help prevent and treat skin can cancer including by:
* Providing children with albinism with sunscreen on a regular basis and give serious consideration to including the item on the list of essential medicines and procure them.
* Training and sensitizing health professionals on the treatment of persons on early intervention, detection and support as soon as a child with albinism is born. Also training on prevention and treatment of skin cancer including treatment of keratosis, precancerous lesions and other skin impairment.
* Educating eye specialists in public health centers on the need for regular low vision clinics to prevent any worsening of the vision of school-aged children with albinism.

**Raise Awareness**

* The government should fund and support awareness - raising activities conducted by local albinism advocacy groups such as Bien-être des albinos de Côte d'Ivoire (BEDACI), Association nationale des albinos de Côte d'Ivoire (ANACI), Association ivoirienne pour la promotion des femmes albinos (AIPFA), etc.
* The government should work with local albinism advocacy groups to conduct understanding albinism seminars in schools, health facilities, villages etc.

1. Preliminary Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Persons with Albinism,” September 12, 2013 at para 14,

   <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session24/Documents/A_HRC_24_57_ENG.doc>, and Esther S. Hong, Hajo Zabeed, Michael H. Repacholi, “Albinism in Africa as public health issue”, BMC Public Health, vol. 6, No. 212 (August 2006). [www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/6/212](http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/6/212) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Yakubu, Alkassim, Mabogunje and Oluwatope. “Skin Cancer in African Albinos” Acta Oncologica, Vol. 32, No. 6, pp. 621-622. 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Côte d’Ivoire, Doudou Diène, January 2014, pages 14 & 15 paragraph 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Côte d’Ivoire, Doudou Diène, January 2014, page 15 paragraph 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A case of two babies with albinism abandoned by their 2 genitors in August 2013 was report to UTSS in 2015 by the NGO BEDACI. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Under The Same Sun (UTSS) Reported Attacks of Persons with Albinism – Most recent attacks included <https://www.underthesamesun.com/sites/default/files/Attacks%20of%20PWA%20-%201%20page.pdf> accessed April 13, 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Under The Same Sun (UTSS) Reported Attacks of Persons with Albinism – Most recent attacks included <https://www.underthesamesun.com/sites/default/files/Attacks%20of%20PWA%20-%201%20page.pdf> accessed April 13, 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. UTSS recorded the survivor’s account. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Daily Brief on Côte d’Ivoire for 20 November 2008**;** UNPOL and Human Rights Division investigate alleged abduction of Albino twins; <https://onuci.unmissions.org/daily-brief-du-20-novembre-2008> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. NGO BEDACI - Bien-Etre Des Albinos de COTE D’IVOIRE - Email : [ongbedaci@gmail.com](mailto:ongbedaci@gmail.com) – BEDACI communicated to UTSS in June of 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Local daily Paper “Soir Info” the issue of October 2 and 3, 2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Reported by BEDACI [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Reported by BEDACI [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Reported by BEDACI [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A research officer for the Israeli Refugee Determination Unit, Ministry of Interior [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Local newspaper Notre Voie, Posted Friday, July 20, 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Posted Wednesday, January 16, 2013 by Le Patriote, a major newspaper in Côte d'Ivoire [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. African Website: [www.koaci.com](http://www.koaci.com), *A boy with albinism escapes a ritual crime,* May 31, 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Reported by BEDACI [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. A Popular Pan African news website [www.koaci.com](http://www.koaci.com) , July 14, 2015; Article can be found at: <http://koaci.com/cote-divoire-corps-enfant-albinos-decouvert-dans-maison-inachevee-cheveux-emportes-103042.html>; also, Mr. Mamidou Coulibaly, founder and chairperson of the Albinism Association in Ivory coast – BEDACI - confirmed the news report by phone after meeting with Captain Kouassi, the Police Officer in charge of the investigation at Yopougon Police Station "Commissariat du 16e Arrondissement de Yopougon". Mr. Coulibaly’s contacts are: [ongbedaci@yahoo.fr](mailto:ongbedaci@yahoo.fr) or [ongbedaci@gmail.com](mailto:ongbedaci@gmail.com),Cell: +225-05 42 07 39 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. On July 4, 2017, France's Major Albinism Group Genespoir published this case on their FaceBook page; http://aip.ci/cote-divoire-le-corps-dun-petit-albinos-retrouve-dans-un-puits-a-kani/; from Benedict Louyer, deputy chairperson, email address genespoir@wanadoo.fr; / also UTSS was in contact with Mamidou Coulibaly, founder and chairperson of the NGO BEDACI, Email: ongbedaci@gmail.com; ongbedaci@yahoo.fr; Phone:+225-05-42-07-39 / +225-07-67-43-26 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. <https://www.underthesamesun.com/sites/default/files/GUIDE-RAPIDE-UTSS.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)