



ACERWC
African Committee of Experts on
the Rights and Welfare of the Child

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**FACT-FINDING MISSION OF THE AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE
RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD CONCERNING A COMMUNICATION
ALLEGING VIOLATIONS OF THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON THE RIGHTS AND
WELFARE OF THE CHILD**

Communication No: 0017/Com/001/2021

**Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network, Institute for Human Rights and
Development in Africa and Centre for Human Rights (On Behalf of Children
Affected by Witchcraft Accusations in Nigeria)**

V

The Federal Republic of Nigeria

I. Background and justification of the fact-finding mission

1. The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC/the Committee), in line with its mandate under Article 42 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC/the Charter), conducts various activities to promote and protect the rights and welfare of the child across Africa. Article 45 of the Charter empowers the Committee to resort to any appropriate method to investigate matters falling within the ambit of the Charter, including requesting from the State Parties any information relevant to the implementation of the Charter and resorting to any appropriate method of investigating the measures the State Party has adopted to implement the Charter.
2. Additionally, Section XV of the Guidelines for the Consideration of Communications and Monitoring Implementation of Decisions (Revised Communication Guidelines) provides that the ACERWC may conduct on-site investigations before deciding on the merits of a Communication if deemed necessary or beneficial.
3. Accordingly, the Committee cites Communication No. 0017/Com/001/2021-Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN), Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa and Centre for Human Rights (On Behalf of Children Affected by Witchcraft Accusations in Nigeria) against the Federal Republic of Nigeria, bringing to the attention of the ACERWC an alleged violation of the rights of children accused of witchcraft practices.
4. The Committee expresses concern regarding allegations that many children between the ages of 3 and 14 years in Nigeria are affected by accusations of witchcraft practice, which is deeply rooted in the cultures and traditions of some communities in Nigeria, in areas including Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bauchi, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Taraba States. The Communication alleges that affected children include children in street situations, children with disabilities, including children with albinism and children with autism, children born as twins, premature, or in breech positions, children who have red eyes, who allegedly stare at others or avoid looking at the eyes of others. The Communication brings to the attention of the Committee that children accused of witchcraft are subjected to severe beating that causes death, killings, burning by fire or acid, forced ingestion of poison, hazardous work and starvation. It is further alleged that children accused of witchcraft practices are stigmatised, discriminated against, abandoned, tortured, in some cases buried alive, and denied their basic rights such as education and health care. These violations are allegedly perpetrated by family members, community members, and religious groups. The allegations further include that there is a lack of due diligence to enforce the law by failing to investigate and prosecute cases of witchcraft accusations and to undertake other measures to protect children who are affected by witchcraft accusations.
5. The central focus of the Communication and the fact-finding mission revolves around the claim that the Government of Nigeria has not implemented or undertaken sufficient measures to protect children from accusations of witchcraft, nor provided adequate support to affected children. Concerns were raised regarding the lack of effective prosecution of perpetrators.
6. The ACERWC, during its 41st Ordinary Session held from 26 April-06 May 2023, declared the communication admissible, following which a hearing on merits

was conducted in the presence of both the Applicants and the Respondent State during the 44th Ordinary Session, held from 02-12 October 2024. After the hearing, the ACERWC decided to conduct an on-site investigation mission to make a well-informed decision regarding the merits of the alleged violations of the right to non-discrimination, right to life, survival, and development, right to education and the rights of children with disabilities.

7. The on-site investigation mission was conducted from 21 to 25 July 2025. The Committee expresses appreciation to the Federal Republic of Nigeria for authorising and ensuring the successful undertaking of the mission.

II. Objectives of the fact-finding mission

8. The main objectives of the fact-finding mission were to:
 - a. Investigate the nature and extent of the practice of witchcraft accusations against children and examine the risk factors that subject children to such practices.
 - b. Assess the accuracy of the allegations of the violations of children affected by witchcraft accusations.
 - c. Review the measures undertaken by the State to eradicate the practice in law and in practice and assess if it is sufficient to respond to the alleged violations.
 - d. Review procedures for investigating and prosecuting children's rights violations linked to witchcraft accusations.
 - e. Gather first-hand information from children and other stakeholders to assist the ACERWC to make informed decisions on the merits of alleged violations.

III. Composition of the ACERWC delegation

9. The Delegation of the ACERWC designated to undertake the fact-finding mission in the Federal Republic of Nigeria comprised of:
 - a. Hon. Robert Doya Nanima, Head of the Delegation and Country Rapporteur of Nigeria
 - b. Hon. Joseph Sunday Sinnah, Member of the ACERWC
 - c. Dr Ayalew Getachew Assefa, Ag. Executive Secretary of ACERWC Secretariat
 - d. Mr. Solomon Onsase, Senior Finance Officer
 - e. Ms. Adiam Zemenfes Tsighe, Senior Legal Researcher
 - f. Ms. Opal Masocha Sibanda, Legal Researcher

IV. Methodology

10. The ACERWC delegation conducted an on-site investigation to assess the situation of children facing accusations of witchcraft in Nigeria. The delegation convened meetings and consultations particularly in Abuja and Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the delegation met with the following stakeholders:

- Representatives of Ministries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development; Office of the Attorney General and Minister of

Justice; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Health and Social Welfare; Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs)

- National Human Rights Commission
- Department of State Services
- Deputy Governor of Akwa Ibom State
- Youth representatives
- Representative of traditional leaders
- Nigeria Police Force
- NGOs
- National Council of Women Societies
- Child Protection Network
- Children
- UNICEF
- International Organisations (Plan International and SOS Children's Villages)
- Legal Practitioners
- Representatives of CRARN

V. Engagements in Abuja

1.1. Courtesy visits

11. Courtesy visits were conducted with various Ministries and the Human Rights Commission in Abuja. The purpose was for the delegation to express gratitude to the government of Nigeria for hosting the mission and to explain the purpose of the mission, the modalities and its expected outcomes.

a) Ministry of Foreign Affairs

12. During the courtesy visit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Delegation of the ACERWC was received by Ambassador Dunoma Umar Ahmed, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Permanent Secretary expressed appreciation to the Committee for undertaking the fact-finding mission and reaffirmed that the Federal Republic of Nigeria remains committed to supporting the child rights discourse at both the national and continental levels. The Permanent Secretary emphasized that the Government of Nigeria attaches high priority to the promotion and protection of the rights of children. He noted that child protection is not only a national priority but also a continental imperative, to which Nigeria remains steadfastly committed.

13. In his remarks, the Permanent Secretary acknowledged the important work of the Committee and assured that Nigeria will continue to cooperate with and support the mandate of the Committee. He outlined the progress made by the Government in strengthening the rights of children in general, including legislative reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and wide-ranging awareness-raising programs. He also highlighted the implementation of various child empowerment programs designed to promote the holistic development of children. While acknowledging these positive developments, the Permanent Secretary recognised the challenges that remain, particularly in relation to resource allocation and enforcement of legal frameworks. He concluded by

highlighting that the Government remains determined to address these gaps and is undertaking concerted efforts to bridge them.

b) Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development

14. The Delegation of the ACERWC was received by the Honourable Minister of Women Affairs, Mrs. Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim ^{FSI}, together with the Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, Dr Maryam Ismaila Keshinro. The Ministry emphasized the centrality of children to its mandate, alongside women and families, and reaffirmed the Government's commitment to child protection. The Honourable Minister highlighted progress made regarding children's rights in general, through the adoption of regulations and the establishment of implementing structures, with further reviews of policies envisaged to enhance implementation and reporting, including to the ACERWC. She drew attention to key national frameworks, such as the National Action Plan on ending child marriage and the Strategy on ending violence against children. The Ministry also noted its leadership in hosting the Global Pathfinding initiative, reflecting Nigeria's continental role in advancing child rights.
15. Three major areas of concern were outlined that is, ensuring the protection, development and advancement of the African child through a comprehensive strategy; addressing resource constraints and developing appropriate financial structures, including engaging private sector actors; and strengthening regular and timely reporting on child rights measures beyond periodic State Party reports.
16. Regarding children accused of witchcraft, the Ministry underscored that this remains a work in progress, with the Government committed to investigating and addressing such cases through the National Action Plan on ending violence against children. The Ministry emphasized ongoing collaboration with relevant stakeholders to ensure that affected children are protected and rehabilitated.
17. The delegation, while commending these efforts, encouraged the Government to expedite the submission of its second periodic report under the Charter, and further invited Nigeria to consider hosting a future session of the Committee.

c) Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Justice

18. The Delegation of the ACERWC was received by the Honourable Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Mr. Lateef Olasunkanmi Fagbemi ^{SAN}, together with the Solicitor-General of the Federation and Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Justice, Mrs. Beatrice Ejodamen Jedy-Agba.
19. The Hon. Attorney General reaffirmed that Nigeria is a signatory to both international and regional treaties on child rights, while also noting the complexity of implementation in a federal system comprised of diverse states, cultures, and local governments. The Hon. Attorney General emphasized the importance of grounding interventions in factual evidence, highlighting the need to document and present the specific numbers of children affected by violence, including those accused of witchcraft.
20. Regarding witchcraft accusations against children, it was acknowledged that while it would not be accurate to claim the phenomenon does not exist, the

scale and extent of its occurrence are limited. Nonetheless, it was stressed that there are laws that criminalize such harmful practices and that the Government is committed to ensuring they are not condoned. The Delegation of the ACERWC was informed that, beyond the legal frameworks, other measures taken to curb the practice and protect affected children extend to advocacy initiatives and social engagements.

d) National Human Rights Commission

21. The Delegation of the ACERWC held a courtesy meeting with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), during which it was received by Dr Anthony Okechukwu Ojukwu SAN, Executive Secretary and Chief Executive Officer of the Commission, together with Directors of various departments. The Executive Secretary highlighted that the NHRC has dedicated departments on children's rights and vulnerable groups, stressing that the care of children remains a priority. He noted that while many states have enacted child rights laws and some have established family courts, effective implementation continues to face challenges. The delegation was informed that the Commission receives cases of violence against children, which are either resolved directly or referred to the Attorney General or the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) for prosecution. The Commission has developed a child safeguarding policy, conducted audits in seven regions with civil society partners, and operates 46 sexual assault referral centres, many of which include child-friendly facilities. It also manages a nationwide toll-free line for reporting child abuse.
22. The Executive Secretary further noted that nearly 40 per cent of cases handled by the Commission involve women and children. He underscored the work of the special panel on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, highlighted the provision of diversion measures for children in conflict with the law, and reaffirmed the Commission's role in advising the Government and other agencies on children's issues.
23. On the issue of witchcraft allegations, the Commission acknowledged that such harmful cultural practices persist but emphasized that continuous education and awareness-raising efforts are contributing to a reduction in such cases. The Executive Secretary confirmed that while a case concerning witchcraft was received by the Commission's panel, it related to an adult rather than a child.

1.2. Technical meeting with government representatives

A technical meeting was conducted with representatives of government ministries in Abuja. The information received from the said representatives is detailed below.

Legal Provisions Addressing Witchcraft Accusations

24. The Delegation of the ACERWC was informed that there is currently no legislation in Nigeria that directly addresses the practice of witchcraft, as such allegations cannot be proven in a court of law. However, various legal instruments exist to prohibit violence, abuse, and inhumane or degrading treatment against children, which extend protection to those accused of witchcraft.

25. It was highlighted that the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria expressly prohibits the maltreatment of children. In addition, the Child Rights Act prohibits violence against children in all forms and has been domesticated in all 36 states of the Federation, with an ongoing review process to further strengthen its provisions. The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act also contains specific provisions prohibiting violence against children, even though it does not explicitly reference witchcraft.
26. The delegation was further informed that Nigeria's constitutional framework provides for a division of legislative powers between the federal and state governments. Matters on the exclusive legislative list are the sole responsibility of the federal government; those on the concurrent list may be legislated by both the federal and state governments, while residual matters fall to the jurisdiction of local governments. In the event of conflict between federal and state law, federal law prevails. This structure has implications for the enforcement of child protection laws across the country.

Legal Reforms and Directives

27. The Delegation was informed that, while there is no single national law explicitly criminalizing witchcraft accusations, various legislative and policy measures have been adopted across the country to protect affected children. Owing to the peculiarity of the issue in some regions, certain states have enacted specific laws and policy measures to address the problem directly.
28. It was highlighted that the present Communication before the Committee has prompted further reforms, particularly in Akwa Ibom State, where measures such as the establishment of family homes and rescue centres for children have been introduced. The Government has also set up a specialized department on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence within the Ministry of Justice, and family courts have been created to deal specifically with matters concerning children. In addition, the Committee was informed that efforts have been made to ensure wider accessibility of legislation by translating key child protection laws into three major national languages.
29. The delegation was informed of several policy and programmatic measures adopted by the Government to strengthen child protection. A costed National Action Plan on ending violence against children has been developed, alongside a policy on alternative care to support victims in need of protection and rehabilitation. The Government has also launched a national campaign to end female genital mutilation and initiated a policy dialogue on ending violence against children, reaffirming its commitment at the Bogota Ministerial Conference to take concrete measures in this regard.
30. The delegation was further informed that, while earlier legal and policy frameworks were primarily focused on the rights of girls, recent efforts also emphasize the protection of the boy child, ensuring that child protection measures are inclusive of all children.
31. The delegation was further informed that coordination mechanisms have been established to strengthen implementation. These include the Federal Justice Sector Reform Committee, which brings together key actors across the justice chain, such as the police, courts, and correctional services, to monitor and support the enforcement of child protection laws nationwide. The Child Protection Network also plays a role in responding to offences against children.

In addition, the NAPTIP was highlighted for its role in hosting victims of abuse and exercising prosecutorial powers in certain cases.

Status of Cases and Prosecutions

32. The Delegation of the ACERWC was informed that in 2010, a Judicial Commission of Inquiry was established in response to widespread reports of witchcraft-related abuse against children. The Commission carried out investigations, identified several individuals implicated in the abuse, and recommended their arrest and prosecution. It was reported that some victims were rehabilitated and placed in centres for care and protection. The Prosecutor General of Akwa Ibom State was engaged to follow up on the matter.
33. In relation to the eight individuals specifically named by the Commission who subsequently fled their communities, the Committee was informed that a court order was issued to exhume graves as part of the investigations, though no evidence was reportedly found. Concerns were raised regarding the limited progress in pursuing prosecutions, despite the Commission's findings and recommendations.
34. The delegation was informed that in earlier years, particularly in Akwa Ibom State, children working as domestic workers were among those frequently accused of witchcraft. This trend has since declined, with empowerment initiatives helping to change harmful mindsets. Reforms such as free primary and secondary education and government coverage of fees for the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) were also highlighted as measures aimed at supporting children and reducing vulnerabilities.

Collaboration Between Ministries and Stakeholders

35. The delegation was informed that the President has mandated collaboration among all ministries to strengthen child protection. The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development coordinates closely with other ministries and has established a dedicated department for orphans and children with special needs, who are not formally referred to as 'vulnerable children.' It was noted that while policies are initiated at the federal level, they are cascaded to the state level through the State Ministries of Women Affairs.
36. The National Council of Women Societies was identified as the highest decision-making body in this area, bringing together federal and state authorities to make joint decisions on the development of policies and laws. Once adopted, such measures are further disseminated to traditional leadership structures to ensure local ownership and implementation.
37. The delegation was further informed that on 14–15 November 2022, a petition was submitted to the Ministry of Women's Affairs requesting an investigation into witchcraft allegations against children. A meeting was held, which identified poverty, false prophecies by pastors and traditional leaders, HIV and AIDS, and parental separation as contributing factors to such accusations. Ten children were listed in this investigation, six of whom were met at the Divine Children's Home. At the time, the youngest was 16 years old. Some of the children were later placed in schools or reunited with their families, while two were reported to have married.

38. It was noted that civil society organizations continue to provide support, with some of the children having since become emancipated. However, stakeholders reported that there are no new cases currently being recorded.

Children with Disabilities

39. The delegation was informed that in some communities, children with disabilities are still regarded as bad omens, a perception which deprives them of education and exposes them to discrimination. To address this, awareness-raising initiatives have been introduced to show that children with disabilities have abilities and should be included in society. Inclusive education has become a central pillar of education policy, and what occurred in 2010 has helped to raise awareness and transform public attitudes.
40. The Government has also adopted a policy on children with disabilities and established a department for children with special needs, including those with conditions such as cerebral palsy. Special schools have been set up across the country to provide targeted support and ensure that all children, regardless of ability, can access education.

Children Hosted in Care Homes

41. The delegation was informed that children accused of witchcraft and other vulnerable children are hosted in government-supported centres, which serve as temporary rather than permanent homes. These centres provide shelter until families can be traced and the children reintegrated, either with their parents or with close relatives. It was highlighted that rehabilitation is prioritized to address the mental health needs of the children, followed by access to education. Policies have been developed to support educational re-entry, including guidelines for children who have never attended school, those who have dropped out, and those residing in internally displaced persons' centres.
42. The Committee also received information on specialized sections established within some centres for adolescents who have experienced abuse. These facilities provide one-on-one sessions with psychologists and counsellors to support recovery and reintegration.

1.3. Engagement with UNICEF

43. The Delegation of the ACERWC had a meeting with the UNICEF country office in Abuja. The Committee was informed that allegations of witchcraft against children remain prevalent in several parts of Nigeria, particularly in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, which have recorded the highest number of reported cases. The Committee was informed that these accusations are not new but are deeply rooted in longstanding traditional beliefs. However, the issue has evolved into a significant contemporary concern affecting child protection systems. It was also shared that the problem extends beyond these two states and has been observed in other regions, such as Delta State.
44. The delegation was informed that, as of 2025, over 200 children have been received into CRARN rehabilitation centres in the Niger Delta region, and 178 are currently under the care of State Ministries of Women Affairs. Despite this, it was shared that there is a level of state denial concerning the scale of the

issue, largely due to the influence of powerful religious actors who enjoy political protection.

45. It was shared that children as young as two years old have been accused of witchcraft. The delegation was informed that accused children suffer extreme violations of their rights, including torture, beatings during deliverance rituals, and other forms of physical and psychological abuse. These children are often stigmatized, excluded from their families, schools, and communities, and denied access to justice, healthcare, education, and psychosocial support. Some have been left to die or subjected to attempted killings. A particularly grave case involved a child who was reportedly nailed in an attempt to kill him but was ultimately rescued.
46. It was also shared that these children are frequently abandoned by their parents, sometimes after families experience hardship, job loss, or illness and are left on the streets with no access to care. The delegation was informed that reintegration into alternative care remains a significant challenge. While some children have found placement in care homes, particularly in Cross River State, many remain without support. The delegation was further informed that, beyond the acts of violence themselves, these children face long-term developmental harm due to educational deprivation and lack of access to critical services. Many are unable to return to school, and some communities and institutions continue to treat them with suspicion and rejection.
47. It was shared that the root causes of this phenomenon include entrenched traditional beliefs, widespread poverty, ignorance, weak enforcement of child protection laws, and the increasing commercialization of religion. The Committee was informed that certain Pentecostal churches have played a role in perpetuating these harmful practices under the guise of spiritual deliverance, thereby exploiting vulnerable families for financial or social gain. It was emphasized that addressing this issue requires a multi-sectoral approach. The delegation was informed of the need to strengthen law enforcement, build capacity among duty bearers, including teachers, police, and community-based service providers and to develop comprehensive community sensitization campaigns. It was also shared that engaging both religious and traditional leaders is essential, given their influence over local belief systems.
48. In addition, the delegation was informed of the need of the government to invest in skills acquisition and rehabilitation programs for affected children and to closely monitor and regulate spiritual homes and religious institutions implicated in abuse. It was also shared that other harmful traditional practices, such as burying children alongside mothers who die during childbirth, persist in some areas and are similarly tied to poverty and harmful beliefs. It was concluded that these abuses amount to serious violations of children's rights and require immediate, coordinated, and sustained action from government agencies, civil society, traditional and faith-based leaders, and community actors.

1.4. Technical Meeting with CSOs

49. The Delegation of the ACERWC held a technical engagement with civil society organizations and international partners to gain deeper insight into the situation of children accused of witchcraft and other child protection concerns. The session provided an opportunity to hear from a broad range of actors working

directly with affected children at the grassroots level, as well as from organizations engaged in policy, advocacy, and service delivery. Children were also represented during the engagement, ensuring that their voices informed the Committee's assessment.

Historical context of witchcraft allegations against children

50. The delegation was informed that accusations of witchcraft against children drew significant public attention between 2000 and 2007, a period during which the practice was at its peak. Evangelical ministers and certain churches were reported to have conducted so-called deliverance sessions for children accused of witchcraft. The release of the film *End of the Wicked* further amplified the issue, while international media coverage led to global outcry and condemnation. In response, the Government enacted the Child Rights Law in Akwa Ibom State in 2008, championed by the current Senate President. While this legal instrument initially helped reduce the prevalence of cases, civil society representatives reported that harmful beliefs and practices continue to persist, particularly in rural areas and slums.
51. It was further observed that in some communities, hardship or misfortune is attributed to witchcraft, with blame often directed at children or other vulnerable household members. Stepmothers were reported to sometimes accuse children of witchcraft, especially in cases where they experienced difficulties conceiving. Ignorance, superstition, illiteracy, and poverty were identified as the root causes of these accusations, underscoring the urgent need for common solutions and community-level awareness raising to address and eradicate such harmful practices.

Documented cases

52. The delegation heard accounts from different states reflecting the persistence and seriousness of the problem. In River State, following the death of a mother, her children were divided among relatives. One relative accused the children of killing their mother, reportedly linked to property inheritance disputes and with the involvement of a pastor. Under pressure and denial of food by an aunt, the children admitted to the accusations and were remanded in custody until later interventions secured their release. In another case, in a secondary school, children accused a fellow student of witchcraft and physically assaulted him. The school was cautioned, and the perpetrators were suspended, with emphasis that no child should be beaten or abused based on witchcraft allegations.
53. The delegation was further informed of incidents in Nasarawa State. About two to three years ago, several children were accused of being witches and wizards and taken to a pastor who starved them in his church. One child reportedly died as a result, and the pastor was arrested and remains on trial. In another case, a father accused his son of cult membership, took him to a village, killed him, and buried him. The father was subsequently arrested and remains in detention, though it was reported that the warrant for his execution has not yet been signed.
54. In Enugu State, a 12-year-old girl employed as a domestic worker was accused of witchcraft by her employer, who claimed that her business collapsed after

the girl's arrival. The child was subjected to starvation and repeated beatings before fleeing in search of her parents. She was later taken to the police, who arrested the foster mother, and has since been placed in a safe space for protection. Reports also indicated that in Akwa Ibom, children born as twins are still accused of witchcraft, and in extreme cases, killed because of these beliefs. Civil society representatives added that allegations of witchcraft in Akwa Ibom remain prevalent and are reported daily, with many cases occurring in rural communities where complaints must first be presented to village heads before reaching the police. As a result, cases are often resolved at the community or police station level, rather than progressing through the courts. The Committee was informed of one such case currently being addressed by a traditional leader, with efforts focused on reintegrating the child into the community.

55. Other testimonies underscored the scale of abandonment, with reference made to an 81-year-old woman in Oron who currently shelters 22 children accused of witchcraft. These cases illustrate the continued vulnerability of children in rural areas and urban slums, where access to justice and protective services is limited.

Children with disabilities

56. The delegation also received information on children with disabilities, particularly deaf children, who face heightened vulnerability to accusations of witchcraft. Harmful beliefs persist, including the perception that deafness is caused by evil spirits, with reports that pregnant women sometimes run away upon seeing a deaf child. Such misconceptions contribute to severe discrimination, abandonment, and abuse. In some cases, parents leave their deaf children in schools or public spaces. Civil society representatives pleaded for the inclusion of deaf communities in awareness-raising initiatives, stressing that deaf children are often unaware of ongoing issues and disproportionately affected by witchcraft accusations.

Child protection initiatives by the government

57. In relation to government responses, the delegation was informed that while the Child Rights Law provides for the establishment of centres to support children in conflict with the law, children requiring shelter, and children needing rehabilitation, such facilities remain inadequate. Implementation is further hampered by poor interpretation of child protection laws by law enforcement, which discourages effective reporting and prosecution. A Shadow Report in 2018 highlighted these gaps, and while a Technical Working Group on ending violence against children has been established by the Ministry of Women Affairs, and National Child Rights Implementation Committees have been put in place, challenges of resource allocation, awareness, and enforcement continue to hinder progress.

VI. Engagements in Akwa Ibom State

58. During the fact-finding mission in Nigeria, the ACERWC had the opportunity to travel to Akwa Ibom, one of the States named in the Communication under investigation, where witchcraft accusation of children is allegedly prevalent. The

ACERWC had various meetings with the State Government in Akwa Ibom on 22-23 July 2025. The meetings and summary of the discussions are as follows:

a. Meeting with the Deputy Governor

59. On 22 July 2025, the ACERWC held its first meeting with the Deputy Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Senator (Dr) Akon Eyakenyi. During the meeting, the Delegation of ACERWC explained the objective of the mission and commended the State for receiving the ACERWC's Delegation, in areas of health and education, which is commendable.
60. The Deputy Governor welcomed the Delegation of the ACERWC and informed the Delegation that Akwa Ibom is among the fastest-growing states in Nigeria. She highlighted that decentralization is at its peak, and every local government has improved road network connecting to the other, as an initiative of the Governor. It was highlighted that the State is compassionate about youth and children, with a focus on education and health services. The Deputy Governor also informed that special skills acquisition centres with starter kits are put in place to assist youth to start their livelihoods, which has yielded results in the past two years. Moreover, entrepreneurship training is provided for children on the street.
61. In relation to children accused of witchcraft, the Deputy Governor highlighted that they are provided with all services, and measures have been undertaken to avert the scourge. Legislative measures are undertaken by adopting the Child Rights Law in 2008 and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Law in 2011, among others. It was informed that the State has also taken measures to address the issue of widowhood practices, which affect women and their children. In addition, it was highlighted that, due to high incidents of violence against children accused of witchcraft being reported in 2010, the State launched an investigation into the matter and established children's homes as well as family courts. Furthermore, there is free medical treatment for any kind of violence and homes for survivors are established. It was provided that separate homes are established for gender-based violence survivors, trafficking victims, vulnerable and abandoned children, and children in street situations.
62. The Deputy Governor further informed that there is free and compulsory education for children. Model schools are established in each local government and have all the facilities for children with disabilities. The Model Schools also provide facilities such as uniforms, books, and other services, and the State intends to recruit more teachers. The Deputy Governor highlighted that all 31 local governments have at least one model school. Moreover, it was highlighted that facilities for education and health centres are the same in all areas as per the model school standards. The discussion also informed that there is a sexual and gender-based violence department in the Ministry of Justice in the State, which was later duplicated at the federal and other state levels. It was also underlined that there is a free line for reporting cases of violation. The Deputy Governor stressed the commitment of the State for the protection and promotion of children and mentioned that continuous sensitization is required at churches, schools, other places, to educate parents, villages, leaders, etc.

b. Technical Meeting with Representatives of the State Government

63. Technical deliberations were held on the issues under investigation with various officials, including the Attorney General, Solicitor General, Commissioner for Women Affairs, and Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs of Akwa Ibom State, among others.
64. The Government of Akwa Ibom State, in elaborating on the prevalence of witchcraft accusations, provided that the practice does not exist anymore, and no recent allegations have been received. It was highlighted that the practices used to exist due to traditional and some church practices; however, they ended long ago. The State highlighted that it follows an institutional approach to stopping the practice, whereby laws and institutions are set in place to prevent all kinds of violence against children. Information was provided that the practice was more prevalent before 2010, where various cases were reported and hardly known beyond 2010. It was provided that a Commission of Inquiry was set up following the increased reports of cases in 2010, and the Commission of Inquiry provided recommendations on how to redress the issues. However, it was informed that the case reported in 2010 does not reflect the reality, as the documentary was orchestrated by some actors pushed by money.
65. Highlighting some of the progress, the ACERWC Delegation was informed that the adoption and domestication of the Child Rights Act of 2008 clearly outlawed practices of this nature. The Child Rights Act criminalizes the abandonment of children and imprisons parents if children are on the street during school hours. The Criminal Code also provides for stringent punishment of imprisonment and a fine of 500,000 to 5 million Nigerian Naira for the accusation of witchcraft. Any sexual intercourse with a child is sexual violence. It was also highlighted that even before the Act came into force, the judiciary was applying the repugnancy test to evaluate the legitimacy of traditional practice. The State representatives informed that currently, the Child Rights Act is domesticated by all States in Nigeria. Moreover, the State has translated the Act into local dialects.
66. The State representatives underlined that the witchcraft accusation is a cultural issue and can be dealt with gradually. Poverty is raised to be the main factor leading to witchcraft accusations, and economically disadvantaged children are more affected. The State representatives provided that education plays a key role in redressing the practice. It was highlighted that in 2025, there was a court decision convicting a perpetrator of a murder in relation to a witchcraft accusation, which was a case hanging for a long time. The State also pointed out that children's homes are established and operationalized for vulnerable children. Particularly, Divine Children's Home is established to cater for children affected by witchcraft accusations and other vulnerabilities, while other homes also exist for children with disabilities, children affected by gender-based violence, and trafficking. In total, there are five Homes managed by Akwa Ibom State under the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare and are uniquely tailored to meet the different needs of the children. Children attend up to higher education at Divine Home, and some children have graduated. The discussion highlighted that there is a national youth service for all graduates; hence, upon graduating, the children can join the national service.
67. The State outlined that sensitization of communities is taking place, including campaigns in churches to raise awareness on the matter. The State also informed that it works with CSOs in its campaigns and advocacy work, which has been successful. CSOs support by bringing vulnerable children to the

attention of the Government for action. The Representatives of the State alluded to the fact that there is a Child Protection Network and Coalition on Violence Against Children in Akwa Ibom, which is composed of all stakeholders. The discussion highlighted that the State implements traditional remedies, which are not against the law, to ensure that traditional leaders own the process and the advocacy. Paralegals are working with traditional rulers and are involved in the advocacy and reporting. There are gender-based violence and child protection officers we meet quarterly to address issues of violations. A state referral mechanism is also implemented to ensure full service for survivors.

68. The State also outlined the existence of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), which oversees averting the trafficking of children for any reason and provides support for victims.
69. The Representatives of the State assured that no child is denied education based on a witchcraft accusation and that all children are accepted by schools. It was also informed that there are children's special schools for children with disabilities; however, inclusive education is now being implemented. The bill on persons with disabilities has currently passed and is in the final stages.
70. Regarding issues of prosecution of perpetrators, the State informed that following the 2010 incident, some of the perpetrators were named by the Commission of Inquiry. However, by the time the list of perpetrators was available, they had run away from their villages and some of them have not returned until now.
71. The State informed that the issue was addressed in 2010, and currently, the practice does not exist. It also reassured that currently there is no trafficking of children due to witchcraft accusations. Finally, the State indicated that the discussion had illuminated some issues that may have been overlooked in addressing the scourge in 2010, as the focus at that time was mainly on rehabilitation.
72. The Committee was also briefed about the State's ARISE Agenda, which stands for 5 pillars, namely agriculture renovation, rural development, infrastructure development, security management, and education expansion. It was indicated that through the ARISE Agenda, vulnerable children are meant to benefit and be provided with education.

c. ACERWC's visit to Government Facilities and Children's Homes

73. During its visit to Akwa Ibom, the Delegation of the ACERWC visited a model school and a model health centre. In addition, the Delegation visited various children's homes established by the State.

- ***Visit to the model school and health centre***

74. During the visit to the model school, the Delegation visited a primary school facility which is established to serve as a model for all the schools in the State. The Committee was informed that at least one school like the model school is established in each local district of the State. The model school has ECD centres, a sick bay, well-equipped classrooms, playgrounds, an ICT Unit and other school facilities. The school provides free education for all children. Similarly, the model health centre the Committee visited serves as a model to be replicated elsewhere. Each local district has at least one health centre like

the model health centre. There are 500 children in the school in 19 classes. However, there is no school feeding program.

75. The Committee, during its visit to the model health centre, was informed that pregnant mothers and children under the age of 5 years receive free health care, including free caesarean, in the model health centre through the State insurance scheme. There is an emergency and ambulance system launched so that whoever is in need can make the call and receive free treatment for the first 48 hours. The model health centre also has a family planning service and a laboratory. Moreover, the model health centre serves as a teaching facility where nurses and midwives receive training.

- ***Visit to Divine Children's Home and Stakeholders' Consultation***

76. The Delegation of the ACERWC had the opportunity to visit Divine Children's Home, where children from the home, community leaders, police, Child Protection Network and the National Human Rights Institution were in attendance. The State informed that the Home was established in 2011 through the then first lady of Akwa Ibom and began operation by relocating nine (9) children from Child's Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN) following its shutdown by the Government. It was established following the many incidents around 2010 as a response to the Government. Initially, the children were in the security village until the Home was finished in 2015. Since its establishment, every First Lady of the State has made it a flagship project. It was mentioned that it is a permanent home for the children and they receive education, health care, shelter and love. The Delegation was informed that the home currently is not only for those affected by witchcraft accusations but also for other children who have been affected by other violence, such as abandonment and neglect.
77. During the visit, the Officials of the State informed that currently sixty (60) children are pursuing their higher education, in addition to six (6) children who already graduated and joined the National Youth Service Corps. Moreover, there are ten (10) children in secondary school, eighteen (18) are in primary and special school, and ten (10) are attending vocational training. It was highlighted that a total of one hundred thirty-two (132) children are in the Divine Home currently.
78. During the visit, the Delegation of the ACERWC requested information on whether any of the children are in the Home due to witchcraft accusations, mentioning some of the recent cases mentioned by the Applicants in their submissions to the ACERWC. It also requested whether the Police or the National Human Rights Commission's office in the region has received a report on violations against children due to witchcraft accusations.
79. Regarding the issue of the reasons children come to the Home, the State explained that currently no child is at the Divine Home due to witchcraft accusations, as the practice has ended. The State informed that the allegations are on social media; however, we cannot verify the allegations. The State received a request from the Federal Government to provide information on the matter, and it was indicated that the State reached out to the chiefs in the community, who verified that no such cases of accusation of witchcraft exist.
80. On the issue of the recent cases raised by the Applicants, the State raised concern about whether the Applicants reported the incidents to the Police or the Ministry of Justice. It was reaffirmed by the representative of the Police that

there has been no report brought to the attention of the police on witchcraft accusation issues. Hence, the State could not address those cases unless reported. However, the State outlined that enough sensitization has been carried out. And in instances where the Government is aware, action is taken. The State mentioned that there is a recent conviction in June 2025 against a perpetrator of murder of his own brother on grounds of a witchcraft accusation.

81. The Traditional Council Leader who was in the meeting during the visit to Divine Home mentioned that witchcraft accusation of children is used to ostracize children and underlined that the Government has taken action.
82. A representative of the Child Protection Network in attendance at the meeting highlighted that any case of violence is reported to the police by the Network, which further investigates the case. The cases are handled by the Family Court, which may decide on placement of the children in Government Homes. However, the Representative informed that the Network has not received any report on a violence that occurred due to a witchcraft accusation, and if it happened, the same process would apply.
83. The speaker of the Children's Parliament of Akwa Ibom also informed the Delegation of the ACERWC that the Parliament has not heard of the issue of witchcraft accusation. The Speaker mentioned that the Government encourages child participation and inclusion. The ACERWC Delegation heard the testimony of a Child from the Children's Home who graduated from university and now works at the Ministry of Justice about the support received in the Children's Home.

- ***Visit to the Gender Based Violence (GBV) Centre***

84. The Delegation of the ACERWC visited the GBV Centre, which was established in 2022 for survivors of GBV. It was mentioned that children who come to the centre stay there for a short period and are provided with rehabilitation support, including health care and vocational training, to promote self-reliance. The State mentioned that since its establishment, one hundred ten (110) cases have been reported to the centre. It was also informed that from the cases at the Centre, one (1) case was reported to be a violence as a result of a witchcraft accusation, where a girl was tied by her father for three years due to a witchcraft allegation. The case was reported by the neighbours, and the child was then taken to Divine Home.

- ***Visit to the Home for children with disabilities and health issues***

85. The Delegation paid a visit to a Home established for children with disabilities and health challenges whose parents could not cater for them. In the Home, health and other professionals care for the children to help them grow and thrive. The Delegation was informed that a total number of fifty-five (55) children are in the Home, out of which five (5) are in secondary school, and one (1) has taken the national examination and is awaiting to go to higher education.

- ***Visit to the special Children's Home***

86. The Delegation of the ACERWC was informed that the Special Home is established for children without parental care where the Governor become their

parent and caters for their needs. The State informed that the Home currently accommodates one hundred forty-five children. Twelve (12) children from the Home are undergoing higher education, twenty-four (24) are in secondary schools, and thirty-six (36) are in primary schools.

- ***Visit to the Transit Camp***

87. The Delegation of the ACERWC was informed that the Transit Shelter was established to protect children in vulnerable situations, mainly internal displacement, abandonment, and trafficking. It is a temporary shelter for children until children are reunified with their respective families. Currently, there are twenty-seven (27) children in the Transit Camp, out of which ten (10) are in secondary school and six (6) are in primary school. The Delegation was informed that among the reasons that result in the children being abandoned is witchcraft accusation. Sometimes, the children are redirected to the Camp by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP).
88. In addition to the Homes visited by the ACERWC Delegation, the State informed that it also runs a Correctional Home which offers a second chance to children who may have conflicted with the law. It provides for a supportive environment for behavioral change through guidance, counselling, education and empathy. The Delegation was informed that the total number of children in the Correctional Home is thirty-seven (37), with twenty-nine (29) boys and eight (8) girls who are undertaking vocational training in shoemaking and sewing.
89. During its Visit to Akwa Ibom, the ACERWC Delegation wanted to hold a meeting with one of the Applicants in the Communication at hand, namely CRARN. Despite its efforts, the Delegation could not hold the intended meeting due to a lack of facilitation to travel to the location of CRARN, which is in Eket district in Akwa Ibom State, located one hour away from the Capital, Uyo. The State also informed that CRARN is no longer registered with Akwa Ibom and that it was shut down long ago. Later, the ACERWC held a virtual meeting with the Applicants to ensure that all parties are heard and equally engaged in the process.

VII. Virtual meeting with the Applicants

90. The ACERWC held a virtual meeting with representatives from the Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN), one of the Applicants in the Communication under investigation, on 18 August 2025. The meeting was attended by Mr. Sam Itauma, Founder of CRARN, the Coordinators of CRARN and some children who stay in CRARN.

- ***Registration and Operation of CRARN***

91. During the meeting, CRARN informed that it is not registered with the Akwa Ibom State Government but is registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), the national body for registering organizations in Nigeria. It also submits annual reports to CAC to maintain its registration, as failure to report may result in the revocation of registration. The Representatives of CRARN emphasized that CAC registration takes precedence over registration at the regional level, which is more of a recognition. Hence, they underlined that their registration

with CAC allows them to operate anywhere in the country. Moreover, CRARN mentioned that it submits a monthly report to the Department of State Services (DSS).

92. CRARN expressed that the registration process at the State is exceedingly difficult and stated they were previously requested to hand over the organization to the Governor's wife, a proposal their trustee board rejected. As a result, the State refused to grant them registration. Representatives of CRARN further clarified that state registration is primarily required to access government support and funding. Despite not having registered in the State, CRARN noted that it is monitored by their local government (Eket Local Government) and has received support from past State Governors, including the Governors from 2006, 2009, and 2022.
93. The ACERWC delegation was informed that the CRRN centre currently accommodates 155 children, of whom about 150 (99 per cent) are affected by witchcraft allegations. Since its establishment, the organization has supported more than 8,000 children in Akwa Ibom State, with approximately 7,000 cases linked to such accusations. The children are mainly those stigmatized and abandoned by families, often due to accusations made by pastors or step-parents. Many were found on the streets, in market squares, in uncompleted buildings, or on roadsides.
94. CRRN representatives explained that documentation of each child's story is carried out upon admission to establish the reasons for abuse or abandonment. Cases are reported to the police and the DSS. Where injuries are sustained, children are first taken to the hospital for treatment. Efforts are then made to reconcile them with their families. Where reconciliation is not possible, the centre provides shelter, education, and support for reintegration into society.

- ***Historical Context of witchcraft accusations***

95. The Committee was informed that in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, street children were not common before the year 2000. However, following the release of the film *End of the Wicked* (1998–1999), communities began to believe that witchcraft existed and affected elders, and children increasingly became the focus of such accusations. Children from families affected by divorce, dysfunction, or the death of parents were often accused of witchcraft, taken to churches for 'diagnosis,' beaten, and sometimes forced to ingest poison known as *esere*. The Committee was informed of widespread killings linked to these beliefs. In total, more than 2,000 people were alleged to have been killed in Akwa Ibom during 2000–2001. CRARN asserted that such abusive practices and even secret killings continue to happen up to now, as new cases are reported each year.

- ***Impact of witchcraft accusations on children's education***

96. Regarding the education challenges faced by children accused of witchcraft, the Committee was informed that because many of them live on the streets, they are unable to attend school. It was reported that children faced discrimination in schools. In one case, a child was beaten by a teacher, and the matter was reported to the police. In response, CRARN Academy was

established to meet their education needs, although now some children are being accepted in public schools. The Committee was informed that despite these efforts, stigmatized children continue to face exclusion, as communities and schools are often reluctant to accept them. It was reported that many children living on the streets do not go to school, while some from CRARN are rejected by educational institutions.

- ***Reporting and prosecution of perpetrators***

97. The Committee was informed that CRARN reports cases of children accused of witchcraft to both the Nigeria Police Force and the DSS, to whom they submit monthly reports. More than half of the cases are reported to the police, while all cases are reported to the DSS. In many instances, the police themselves bring children directly to the centre, including a case where the child of a police officer was beaten and later handed over. Police documentation (police extracts) is provided when children are referred to the centre. The Committee was further informed that the Child Protection Network also brings children to CRARN.

98. The Applicants shared that where children sustain injuries, cases are reported to the police. If no injuries are involved, cases are usually reported to the DSS, as the phenomenon is widespread. Children with mental health conditions found on the streets are sometimes referred to the Ministry of Women's Affairs; in one such case, the child later died, while another was brought by the police for assistance.

99. It was further reported that some perpetrators have been arrested, with a few cases prosecuted through CRARN's intervention. For example, one child who was set ablaze survived and later became a coordinator at a centre in Anambra State. Another case involved a father who paid 20,000 naira to have his child killed; the matter was brought before the court. However, the Applicants noted that cases rarely progress to prosecution.

100. The Applicants highlighted several challenges in the reporting and prosecution process:

a. **Financial barriers**-CRARN alleged that police request 'mobilization money,' an illegal fee to file cases and process investigations. No receipts are issued, and if such fees are not paid, arrests are not made.

b. **Lack of prosecution**-CRARN indicated that even when cases are reported, they are rarely prosecuted effectively. For instance, a specific case reported in 2022 saw no progress. CRARN attributed this to a lack of political will and corruption.

c. **Intimidation and influence**-Perpetrators, including pastors, are sometimes arrested but are often released due to pressure from 'prominent persons.' These individuals then return to threaten and attack CRARN staff, affecting reporting. In one instance, a man attempted to poison children at the centre to prevent a case against him from proceeding. Reports of attempted kidnappings and intimidation underscore the risks faced by CRARN officials.

101. Verification of cases is carried out when children arrive at the centre, often with visible injuries or scars. From their testimonies, CRARN determines that the children have been accused of witchcraft.

- ***Victims' testimonies***

102. The Committee heard testimonies from three victims affected by witchcraft accusations. The first witness was Daniel, a 13-year-old boy. Although the boy could not proceed with giving his testimony, the Applicants informed the Committee that in 2022, his mother reportedly took him to the forest under the pretext of fetching firewood. It is alleged that she instructed him to turn around, then attacked him with a machete to the head and neck. He was left in that state for three days until someone in the area heard his cries, rescued him, and brought him to the hospital. The child had been stigmatized, beaten, and tortured before the incident. The case was reported to the police, but no further action was taken. The Applicants noted that the boy's mother fled to Ibeno, where she reportedly continues to visit the village in secret. CRARN indicated that they are monitoring the case.
103. The second witness was Faith, a 19-year-old female from Eket, currently enrolled at Heritage Polytechnic. She resides at CRARN, where she has lived since 2021, after leaving the home of her aunt due to witchcraft accusations. She reported that following the death of her mother, she was unable to trace her father. Economic hardship and family difficulties led to accusations of witchcraft. She recalled that one day, when a goat died, she was blamed and accused of killing it through witchcraft. As a result, she was forced to leave her aunt's house, at times staying in the toilet or the bush, and later begging for food at a market in Iko. It was there that a woman referred her to CRARN. She narrated that while living with her aunt, she was maltreated and instructed to stop attending school. After arriving at CRARN, the matter of witchcraft accusations was reported to the police and the DSS in 2021. However, the case did not progress to court, with concerns that the police failed to take action.
104. The third witness, Emilia, was a 20-year-old currently schooling at Heritage Polytechnic, where she began her studies in 2024. She has been living at CRARN since 2014. She reported that after losing both parents, she and her brother were taken in by their uncle. Within a few months, he began accusing them of killing their parents and causing misfortunes in the family. She recalled being taken to a church where they were declared responsible for the family's problems. This led to maltreatment in the village. As a result, she and her brother went to the streets and begged for food. She was later rescued and referred to CRARN, where she has since remained, but is unaware of the status of any police case regarding her situation. She added generally that many children accused of witchcraft are abandoned by step-parents and even their own parents, and that CRARN continues to provide care and support for such children.

- ***Children hosted in government homes***

105. The Committee was informed of two government-run homes known to officials, accommodating about 200 children. It was noted that 90 per cent of the children in these homes were forcefully taken in by the government from CRARN. It was shared that one of the facilities, the Divine Children's Home, hosts children who were stigmatized and transferred from CRARN. The Committee was further informed that the home faces challenges, including a lack of food, inadequate care, and difficulties in accessing education. Although

recently renovated, many children dropped out of school due to unpaid fees. It was further submitted that some students have been unable to obtain certificates necessary to continue their studies, particularly for the Higher National Diploma.

106. The Applicants indicated that the children are unhappy, with some expressing frustration publicly through social media posts. It is alleged that at least five children reportedly died in the centre, including one who suffered from epilepsy. Others have run away due to poor conditions. Concerns were raised regarding inadequate monitoring and a lack of effective supervision. Seven students were reported to have dropped out of Uyo University, while about thirteen at the polytechnic level have no certificates. It was noted that while an earlier administration provided more support to the children, the current government has not extended the same level of care. Instances of where CRARN supported school fees for children from Government Homes were mentioned during the meeting. CRARN also stated that there have been instances where they referred children to government homes, but the children were refused admission.

- ***Request for Documentation***

107. Finally, it was agreed that CRARN submits the following documents to the ACERWC:

- Reports submitted to the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) annually, and proof of updated registration.
- Reports submitted to the DSS, particularly those that contain reports of witchcraft accusations.
- Police extracts of reported cases.
- Police extracts of cases of witchcraft accusation brought to CRARN by the Police

VIII. Conclusion

108. In conclusion, this mission was undertaken to conduct an on-site investigation regarding Communication No. 0017/Com/001/2021, concerning alleged violations under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, particularly the rights to non-discrimination; life, survival and development; education; and the rights of children with disabilities. The Committee will consider the findings gathered during the mission in Abuja and Akwa Ibom State, together with the submissions already received, in reaching its final decision on the merits of the Communication. Following its consideration, the Committee will issue a decision and formulate recommendations to the Federal Republic of Nigeria.