

Stop Ukpabio from Bringing Her Witch Hunting Campaign to the US

By Leo Igwe

In March, Nigeria's notorious witch hunter, Helen Ukpabio, is organizing a Deliverance Session in the United States, according to the information posted on the Website of the Liberty Gospel Church <http://libertyfoundationgospelministries.org/images/U.S..jpg>. The event is slated for March 14-25, 2012 at Liberty Gospel Church in Houston, Texas (Tel. 1-832-880-8406 or 1-713-530-2080). The program is said to be "12 days of battling with the spirit of freedom."

A poster lists the categories of people invited to "come and receive freedom from the Lord." It asks:

"Are you in bondage-Having Bad dreams-Under witchcraft attack or oppression-possessed by mermaid spirit or other evil spirits-Untimely deaths in family-Barren and in frequent miscarriages-under health torture-Lack of promotion with slow progress-Unsuccessful life with disappointment-Financial impotency with difficulties-Facing victimization and lack of promotion-Stagnated life with failures-Chronic and incurable diseases?"

Helen Ukpabio is a Christian fundamentalist and a Biblical literalist. She uses her sermons, teachings and prophetic declarations to incite hatred, intolerance and persecution of alleged witches and wizards. Ukpabio claims to be an ex-witch, initiated while she was a member of another local church, the Brotherhood of Cross and Star. She later founded the Liberty Gospel Church to fulfill her "anointed mission" of delivering people from witchcraft attacks.

Ukpabio organizes deliverance sessions, where she identifies and exorcizes people, mainly children of witchcraft. Headquartered in Calabar in southern Nigeria, the Liberty Gospel Church has grown to be a witch hunting church with branches in Nigeria and overseas.

The activities of Helen Ukpabio include her publications, films (such as *The End of the Wicked*) and sermons among factors that raised witchcraft accusations against children in the region. This phenomenon was captured in 2008 on BBC channel 4 in the UK. Thanks to the activities of a UK-based charity, the Stepping Stones Nigeria (SSN) and its local partners, the problem of witchcraft accusations against children and the ignominious roles of Ukpabio and her Liberty Gospel Church and other "superstition miners" were brought to the attention of the world. Since the broadcast of the documentary, Ukpabio and her thugs at the Liberty Gospel Church have been campaigning to undermine Stepping Stones Nigeria and its efforts to tackle and address the problem of child witch hunting in Nigeria.

The Liberty Gospel Church has brought several lawsuits against SSN and its partners—and lost. They have embarked on a smear campaign using local journalists to publish reports in the media which depict projects of SSN in Nigeria to be fraudulent.

In 2009, Ukpabio mobilized her church members. They invaded the venue of a local seminar on witchcraft and the rights of the child organized by Stepping Stones and the Nigerian Humanist Movement in Calabar, Cross River State. They beat up this writer and stole his personal belongings. While police were still investigating the matter, Helen Ukpabio and her church members went to court. They sued this writer, SSN and its partners, asking for millions of dollars in damages, charging the defendants with depriving them of the right to believe in witchcraft. Again, they lost.

The police have yet to arrest and prosecute Ukpabio and her church members for invading and disrupting the seminar, for attacking this writer, and for stealing his personal items. Police have yet to bring this woman to justice for abusing children, allegedly to deliver them from witchcraft, and for inciting violence, hatred and persecution against persons accused of witchcraft.

Efforts must be made to stop this evangelical throwback from spreading her diseased gospel in the US.

[Leo Igwe is the founder of the Nigerian Humanist Movement and a tireless advocate for the rights of children.]