



NEWS AND VIEWS ON SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS AND SUCCESS STORIES AGAINST CHILD WITCH ACCUSATIONS

with guest speaker **Gary Foxcroft**, the Founder of WHRIN

SCWA Coalition

Multi-Agency Forum online October 2021

Our Forum

The SCWA Coalition hold the multi-agency forum twice a year to provide an opportunity to connect for organisations and individuals who are working with the issues of child abuse linked to faith and belief, specifically that of accusations of witchcraft made against children.

Each forum focuses on different aspects of this issue, and invites professionals with relevant expertise to help explore these in some depth. A key emphasis is on improving insights into the complex dynamics behind child witch accusations, and also providing practical positive interventions which can improve the lives of children affected, and help their families and communities become safe places for children.

Our Topic

NEWS AND VIEWS ON SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS AND SUCCESS STORIES AGAINST CHILD WITCH ACCUSATIONS

Our Guest Speaker

Gary Foxcroft is the Founder of the **Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN)**, and has been actively working to raise recognition of human rights abuses and harmful practices related to witchcraft accusations.

In recent years his focus has been on exerting influence towards getting a Resolution on the table at the UN Human Rights Council, which will then pressure governments into action to intervene and respond to cases of accusations and related abuses.



Our Key Contributors

At this Multi-Agency Forum, our key contributors were...

- Carolyn Gent, of the SCWA Steering Group, UK
- Susie Howe, of the SCWA Steering Group, UK
- Revd. Jean-Paul Aruna, of LVLE, Goma, DRC
- Patrick Musafiri, of EPAM, Nyiragongo, DRC
- Revd. Bassey Mbang, Member of Planning Committee in Calabar, Nigeria
- Joy Orowho-Adebayo, Calabar, Nigeria
- Dr. Tim Stabell, Theologian, Canada

Forum Session

Carolyn Gent (SCWA Chair) invited all attendees to introduce themselves, including their location, and any organisation or agency which they represent. We then shared news of work in partnership and collaboration in different locations.

News and views on developments from the D.R. Congo

Inter-agency collaboration

In Goma and the surrounding area, the team of Laissez Vivre Les Enfants (LVLE) have been systematically running training workshops with schools and churches, with some quite dramatic, positive effects. Goma is an area where child witch accusations (CWA) are endemic, often seen as normal, and many of the children on the streets of the city are there because of witchcraft accusations. LVLE was one of the partners who originally piloted “the Heart of the Matter” resource (back in 2015 and 2016). Pastor Jean-Paul Aruna and his team began with about 30 church leaders, but it has grown significantly since then. Pastor Jean-Paul’s team has been working to raise awareness and run training in schools and churches, in order to challenge prevailing attitudes around this issue. There are now hundreds of schools and churches who have received training using “the Heart of the Matter” course. Children who are accused of witchcraft are very vulnerable. Most victims and survivors of witchcraft accusations have prior vulnerabilities, many of them are persons living with disability, some of whom are born with birth defects, and many of them are orphans. So they are easily exploited by religious leaders and traditional practitioners who prey on them for profit.

As a result of their work, local authorities have asked to be included in these trainings, and have come together with local police as well to create intentional collaborations, which are called “Synergies”. Currently there are two of these collaborations established, one in Monigi, and one in Masisi, both localities near to Goma city. Each of these Synergies have devised their own action plans which aim to promote child protection in the area and also to challenge the abusive rituals that occur in the so-called “prayer rooms” around the city, which cause such significant harm to children. Because of the work of these Synergies, the Local Authorities, police, church, schools, and LVLE are actively involved together in bringing training (using “the Heart of the Matter”) to the leaders of the prayer rooms, and also emphasising a new insistence on upholding child protection, which has been a crucial development.

We are immensely encouraged with all that Pastor Jean-Paul has accomplished in that locality using the resources developed in partnership through SCWA.

Challenging perspectives on disability

In the Nyiragongo area of Goma, Patrick Musafiri is focusing on those marginalised due to disability. In July 2021, he ran training aimed at church and community leaders designed to

raise awareness of children and young people with disability, in an environ where there are many negative beliefs around disability.

Children with disabilities are among the most marginalised and most deprived of their human rights in the D.R. Congo, partly due to ignorance about disability, and partly due to the beliefs in witchcraft. It is commonly believed that disability is due to witchcraft. Children and young people with intellectual disabilities are particularly defenceless against accusations as they are often unable to speak up for themselves.

These children are subject to all manner of abuse as a result of accusations of witchcraft, including being tortured, sexually abused, exploited in many ways, not only in the revivalist churches, but also in families and foster families. Those with disabilities are also subject to abusive deliverance rituals carried out by so-called “church leaders” in their community. This targeting of those with disabilities is particularly a problem around the large cities.

Since making use of “the Heart of the Matter” course, Patrick has seen some real positive changes in churches, and he is tracking the results of these. For example, he has seen a change in attitude in church leaders and members, and new support groups are being set up to promote the welfare of these children. Nyiragongo is a large area, and this has only been an initial launch, but it is proving a very positive beginning.

Questions & Discussions

Question to the forum:

- Is the targeting of children with disabilities seen as a problem in other localities?

Tim Stabell: One research student did a lengthy paper on Kisangani (in the D.R. Congo), where a Catholic agency was taking in children who had been accused, and some of them would have had disabilities. It is not just those with disabilities who are accused – as we are well aware, there are lots of different pretexts that can lead to these accusations. So it is a broader issue, but often disability is one of the factors that leads to accusations, unfortunately.

Joy Orowho-Adebayo: It is a common issue in Calabar (in Nigeria) also, where children with disabilities are accused of witchcraft. In one known case, a girl has been accused by members of her family. Also there are many children out in the street, and when you have opportunity to talk with them you will learn that most of them are there because of witchcraft accusations. And you see children as young as five, six, seven years of age being accused. And those with disabilities (depending on the level of disability) are also accused of witchcraft, and they don't get any care from their families.

Available resource on disability:

For those working among children with disabilities, The Bethany Children's Trust has produced a resource, entitled “Transform Disability”. This is very practical and interactive, helping leaders and carers know how to respond to different disabilities, and how to effectively support these children and their families.

It is available via the BCT website resources hub:
– <https://bethanychildrenstrust.org.uk/resources?search>

Comment on progress

In Goma in the D.R. Congo over the last few years, LVLE has progressed quite a long way in terms of developing a response to the phenomenon of CWA, and the related stigma and abuse. Their whole response has been broadened out to include not only churches, but also schools, local authorities, and the police. And added to this is the focus on disability (with EPAM) and other social issues. While there is still much work to do there are a lot of positives to celebrate.

In Calabar in Nigeria our collaboration is at an earlier stage of progress. However, we are thrilled to bring an update on what is happening there as some positive results are already emerging.

News and views on developments from Nigeria

Online training of trainers

In Calabar, working with the Basic Rights Counsel Initiative (BRCI) and the Calabar Planning Committee, we have run an online “training of trainers” workshop. All who attended were competent trainers who engaged strongly with the resource material. One of the modules of “the Heart of the Matter” course was redeveloped to introduce the national and regional legal frameworks for Cross River State. (This section had originally been written to explore and apply the national laws in the D.R. Congo.) SCWA has learnt a lot through this engagement process. It is the first time we have run training remotely in this way.

Early rollout of training workshop

The training team in Calabar then immediately went ahead to run a training course for some 30 church leaders in the Calabar locality. Initial responses from this have been very positive, and the team will follow through on actions with all who attended.

Here **Pastor Bassey Mbang** gives his perspective in this verbal report:

It was a good experience for the three of us trainers. At the beginning, after we had the online training [of trainers] with you, there were some fears among us as to how we were going to handle this, because we’ve never done it [before]. But to the glory of God, and with the testimonies of the participants, it was a very wonderful experience.

All the five days, everybody took part, they were excited. In fact right now, as I’m talking to you, I’ve just proposed a meeting in the workshop group that I’ve created for those we have trained, that we are going to have a meeting, because we don’t have to wait to do the follow-up in three months. Here in Nigeria, if you wait such a long time before you

do follow-up, you will lose the steam [momentum]. So because it is just a month and some days since we had the training, I am calling them for a meeting for us to march on. We are going to be doing monthly evaluations. So the summary of it is that the interest is high, the excitement is there, the pastors are willing.

We have what we call here in Nigeria, local government (which is like maybe you call 'counties' in the UK), but we have 16 local governments. Some pastors who heard of this training called me and said, "Why are you doing it like this? You know this is very prevalent in my local government area, and you have exempted [excluded] me." And we told them, "No we are not exempting you, we are setting up a team that will do the training of trainers." Because of how important that is, there is a lot awareness that other local governments are wanting us to come and have the trainings with them so that they too will be part of this crusade, a part of this advocacy against child witch accusations.

And in the trainings so many pastors were interviewed by BRCI, and you can capture all their excitement in their testimonies. If I were not alone, I would've called one of the pastors who participated to share with you. Perhaps [in a meeting between SCWA and BRCI] we can arrange to bring you one or two pastors who attended the training. There you will have a clearer picture of what happened. But the summary of it is that a great job was done.

Carolyn Gent: SCWA acknowledges the five video clips (including four testimonies) received. It is clear that the training was transformative of thinking for those who attended, particularly regarding children who live on the streets, who had previously been thought of as "devil children", but now participants had understanding that these children are actually victims, and need support and love and care.

A big "thank you!" to Pastor Bassey and all the team. We are very excited to see what will happen as a result of this work, by God's grace.

News and views on developments from the UK

New health resources

SCWA has published and piloted two new resources, both focused around health issues, as a result of frequent requests for resources in this area. There is often a strong connection between beliefs around illness, whether physical or mental, and witchcraft beliefs. Ill health is often used as a pretext for accusations of witchcraft against children and adults. Arising from the beliefs of others, sometimes people with physical and mental illness can be treated very harshly, accused and abused.

The two resources are:

- Sickness, Health, and Healing = a one-day workshop
- Mental Health Matters: = a two-day workshop

Here **Susie Howe** outlines the content:

We've produced these new resources because many have informed us that one of the roots of CWA and indeed, of accusations against adults, is that someone is experiencing sickness or a mental health problem.

Sickness, Health, and Healing (SHH) is a one-day resource, a training workshop, designed for church leaders but equally for community members. It is designed to look at sickness from a theological perspective: what does the Bible say about sickness? — a reality in our fallen world ever since the rebellion of the first humans, when God's perfect order was lost. We still live with this reality. We know that at the cross, Jesus Christ conquered Satan and death itself, and so we know of many occasions when people are miraculously healed through prayer, but equally many people are not miraculously healed (and Jesus himself did not heal absolutely everybody). So, sickness is with us, but as we've seen so often, it may be attributed to the activity of a witch and fingers are pointed [at a scapegoat]. SHH takes us through what the Bible says about sicknesses and healing, and helps people to see the part the church can begin to play in addressing those issues.

Mental Health Matters (MHM), a separate two-day resource, is specifically designed to address the misunderstanding and distorted thinking that exists around people who are living with mental health conditions. Again, it is theologically underpinned. There is a lot of teaching from the Bible, and in the Bible there are a lot of people (even people of God) who experience mental health problems from time to time. So we highlight these. We use a lot of stories in the resource.

We also introduce a fictional character: Pastor Kasongo. And we take the participants through the experience of Pastor Kasongo, who in the story is suffering with depression. We look at how people react to him and treat him — even his wife and members of his family who respond negatively. So people around him do not understand Pastor Kasongo's experience. But in the story we introduce another character, Pastor Ilunga, who understands, and who does some sensitisation with the family around how to support people living with mental health conditions. The story enables participants to begin to ask questions, and to consider their own understanding about mental health problems. On the first day we give a lot of Biblical teaching around people in the Bible with mental health problems and how to respond to them.

On the second day, the story continues, where Pastor Kasongo goes to hospital, and gets support from people in his church, and then how he comes to a place of healing and wants to help others who have mental health conditions. We then do some teaching around four common mental health conditions: post natal depression, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, and also dementia. Each of these include a story, signs and symptoms, some targeted questions, and then open discussion.

Questions & Discussions

Concerning prejudicial attitudes around mental health conditions: After introducing a sample of the training about dementia, Susie led the Forum in a discussion of prevailing attitudes and prejudices towards people with this condition, using questions provided in the resource.

Questions to the forum:

- Have you ever heard of this mental health condition? Have you witnessed people who show the symptoms of this condition (as evidenced by the person in the story)?
- In your community, to what do people attribute this condition?

Patrick Musafiri: in Nyiragongo, people attribute this condition to evil spirits, though they may use a local language name for these conditions. People displaying these symptoms are rejected by society. Even in hospital they can be mistreated, because the medical staff do not recognise the symptoms or understand what is going on. So even in a health care context, they do not get the understanding and care that they need.

Tim Stabell: in Beni, on the eastern side of the D.R. Congo, I do not recall any name given to this [mental illness]. Not only was it believed that the symptoms were caused by witchcraft, but that elderly people exhibiting these symptoms were considered to be, or suspected of being witches.

Bassey Mbang: in Calabar those with dementia are classified as elderly witches, supposedly exchanging other souls for their own soul (for example if someone in the family has died). What happens to them? Normally such persons are allowed to die, stigmatised, abused, left by the roadside — or else sent to psychiatric institutions, though they may not be properly diagnosed. Generally there is no care for them, except for one or two agencies that care for their wellbeing.

Comment on scope of resource

Susie Howe: SCWA is hearing that it is not just children, but also elderly, those most vulnerable, who are being accused of witchcraft. Note that in the Bible it is orphans and widows for whom we are exhorted to care. These are the points that we bring out in the MHM training workshop. To give a sample of the questions that are used in the resource:

- What can we do to help?
- What practical support can our churches give?
- What do you feel we could be doing? — The facilitator gives some tangible ideas for providing practical support for those with mental health issues. We do this for each of the four conditions highlighted in the resource.

Question to the forum:

- How do you think you can use this resource in your context?

Patrick Musafiri: We have recently completed this training in Goma. It was very striking for all of the participants that these illnesses, particularly in the area of mental health, are stigmatised. The two main explanations offered are: it's a curse, or it's due to witchcraft. And often people who present with these symptoms are attacked with rocks or stones. 100% of the participants were very keen to receive training, as they acknowledged they knew nothing about these issues. On the mental health side, they often feel they need input from a psychologist or psychiatrist, on the physical health side they have been trying to introduce a range of responses (in the absence of clinical responses), including prayer and general support. It is difficult to distinguish between a mental illness and an intellectual disability, so these two conditions tend to be treated the same. This type of training is very helpful

in raising awareness of the differences between the two and is beginning to result in positive change.

Bassey Mbang: Persons with albinism are treated as if their condition is “punishment from the gods” so many of them are being accused of witchcraft. For those with dementia, meeting with them gives the opportunity to offer assistance. We’ve had the very first training on “the Heart of the Matter”, and the pastors are willing to move out. In another local government region of Boki, outside Calabar, there is a case of 18 elderly men, where they were accused of being witches and were burned to death. So it is a challenge for the pastors here. This is another area where we are going to focus our attention, to contribute to the wellbeing of society.

Comment on responses

Susie Howe: SCWA certainly do recognise that people living with albinism may be branded as being witches. There are documented cases of this, and organisations advocating for people living with albinism. We also note that change in understanding will take time, not just one-off training. We need to bring the issue into various forums when church leaders are together. The message of this training also needs to be put out in community meetings.

Also, there are changes that can be made that cost nothing. It just takes time: befriending, talking and listening, offering to help the family, and so on. We are trying to encourage a cultural change within the church in their understand towards people with disabilities, and also just knowing there are practical things they can do to be a good neighbour. Jesus would say: “Go with what you’ve got in your hand.” It takes no money to show kindness to a person with dementia, to go and listen to them, befriend them and pray with them. And it takes no money to teach about the issue while standing from the pulpit, as it were. You start with your hands and your voice and your compassion, and you do what you can do. This is the principle of multiplying the loaves and fishes. Jesus will do what he can do in you and through you. We all have a part to play to use our voices and to use our influence.

Available resource on health:

SCWA are now making these new resources available to you for your work and ministry.
– <https://stop-cwa.org/search/resources?name=health>

News and views on developments at the global level

The UN Human Rights Council Resolution

Introducing a presentation by Gary Foxcroft, who is the Founder (and until recently, Director) of the Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN).

We (as SCWA) have been on the same working group with Gary Foxcroft and WHRIN for some years now, at the level of the UN Expert’s Working Group. We have attended UN

meetings in Geneva in Switzerland, and in Lancaster in the UK. And the same team has been meeting this year in Papua New Guinea.

Joining our voices together we have sought to apply pressure to bring about a resolution for the “Elimination of harmful practices related to witchcraft accusations and ritual attacks”.

After an initial refusal to pass this resolution, this July saw the resolution unanimously adopted by the Human Rights Council at the UN. This gives real credibility and impetus to what we are doing to try to raise awareness at government level that these accusations and ritual attacks are unacceptable.

Here **Gary Foxcroft** shares the story of this success:

Hello, good morning everyone. Thank you very much for the opportunity to talk to you today. My name is Gary Foxcroft and I'm the Founder of the Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network. I've been asked to talk to you a little today about the recent UN resolution that the Human Rights Council passed in July this year, on eliminating the harmful practices associated with witchcraft accusations and ritual attacks.

So, just to give you a little background as to why we thought this resolution was necessary. As I'm sure you all know, these issues of children, elderly people, people with disabilities, being accused of witchcraft or ritually attacked, are prevalent across the world, not just in Africa or Asia, but indeed are on the rise seemingly in places like the UK. We felt that the United Nations hadn't properly recognised this issue. And, a bit like what they did with FGM 20 or 30 years ago now, we felt there was a need for UN to acknowledge this form of abuse, and therefore set in process all of the processes and mechanisms but need to take place to put a stop to them.

In terms of my personal approach to this issue: 15 years ago I started working with children accused of witchcraft in Nigeria. The idea then that we will get the UN to pass a resolution was a bit of a pipe dream. But about six years ago I was very fortunate to start working with the UN expert on albinism (Ikponwosa Ero) whom I'd worked with previously when she was [working] at “Under the Same Sun”, the NGO that drove the advocacy and awareness of people with albinism being killed for their body parts in Africa, and also came together with Dr. Charlotte Baker from Lancaster University, whom I'd worked with previously in my role at Stepping Stones Nigeria, and whom I knew had done lots of research on albinism. So the three of us came together, and the big goal then was to get the UN to pass this resolution. And thankfully, working with all the wonderful members of WHRIN: academics, activists, policymakers, survivors, many different people around the world, we came together and successfully advocated for this to be passed.

How did we do that? The first thing that we did was in 2017, at the very first Expert's Workshop on witchcraft and human rights which was at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. And the amazing thing about this was 100 people from all around the world came together using their own funds, supporting others who didn't have their own funds, to hold the first ever workshop on these issues. So that really helped set things moving. And the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), various of the

Special Rapporteurs, and many others were involved in this ground-breaking event. And that really helped to move things forward.

Following that we held a conference at Lancaster University; we held a photography exhibition at the UN Human Rights Council; and we also held different side events in Geneva at the Human Rights Council – just to keep this issue on the agenda, and to make sure that things were moving forward.

Behind the scenes, there was quite a lot of work that took place on developing the correct terminology for this, which was quite challenging and tedious at times. Thankfully I think we've got something that is fairly broad and applicable to many different beliefs and practices (though the long acronym involved is potentially a bit difficult). But it is never easy working on these broader issues, and trying to come up with terminology to capture all of these beliefs and practices. Anyway, we finalised that.

And behind the scenes also the UN Expert was doing lots of work with all the different State Parties to get them on board, lots of meetings with them. Navigating the UN system was very complicated, very bureaucratic, very tedious. Thankfully she was an expert at that, and really helped to manage that side of things.

So, after lots of hard work and lots of sacrifice we finally got the result we wanted. The most important thing for us now is to ensure that this is implemented. This resolution will set in process a number of other events and other pieces of work which will look to develop and embed the UN's approach to dealing with these issues in the wider UN monitoring systems. So, all special rapporteurs, all human rights staff, will be expected to ask State Parties to be reporting on this, and look to identify strategies to prevent more cases of abuse due to harmful practices related to accusations of witchcraft or ritual attacks.

In some ways, the resolution is start of a much bigger piece of work, and there's going to be a lot of work to do in the months ahead to properly embed this in the wider UN system. But much like with FGM 25 years ago or so, when many people hadn't heard of FGM, and there were still debates around whether this was people's culture and we should just be respecting their right to cut children – now, if you think about how things have moved on so quickly on that issue in the last few years especially, we hope that it will be very much the case with this issue as well. [We hope] that by setting this resolution, and identifying the need for more work to be done, it will lead to a process which brings about much more wide ranging systematic change across the board.

What we are particularly interested in at the moment is thinking about how it can be implemented at State level. I've now gone back to working with the charity that I set up, Safe Child Africa, to see how we can support the implementation of it on the ground in Nigeria. I hope that many of you, too, will be looking at how to do this in the UK or any other countries in which you work. I think that one of the most important things for me is the idea that we've tried to publicise this resolution widely, and that any of the survivors who we work with, or any of the families of victims that we work with, find out about this, and we hope that it might give them some solace, and even more: some hope for the

future that things are changing; that even with these extremely complicated and complex beliefs and practices there is hope that one day they will be put to a stop.

I think for me, that is one of the most important things, is that it provides hope for us all that we are moving forward in the right direction, and despite the numerous challenges that we often face with our work, progress is being made. And there is hope that one day these terrible harmful practices will stop.

So, that's a little bit of background of six years of my life or more. I hope that it gives you a little bit of an insight into where we are at with this work, and where we are going with it. Like I said, I hope that this resolution gives you a lift with your work, and that your teams and the children that we are working with also find out about this and also feel that there's a point in the near future where children are no longer accused of witchcraft and horrifically abused.

I want to thank you all for the incredible work you are doing on these issues. Sorry that I've not been part of this group and contributed more, but with the little I've been able to do, we've been able to achieve great things together. So thank you again, I hope you have a great event. If you have any questions or queries, feel free to drop me an email via « gary@whrin.org ».

Thank you very much for listening.

Link to the UN HRC (47th session) Resolution (available in five languages).

– <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/47/L.9>

Questions & Discussions

Question to the forum:

- How can we use the UN Human Rights Council resolution to strengthen our work in addressing child witch accusations?

Carolyn Gent: One way that we have seen starting already is in Namibia, where we have a colleague (Berrie Holtshausen) who has been working towards this UN Resolution with us. He works specifically with elderly people with dementia, and the issues around dementia which we've already been talking about. One thing that has happened in Namibia is that this has had national coverage in the newspapers. I think it is a powerful statement that it is not acceptable to have children or other people accused of witchcraft, nor is it acceptable to have ritual attacks on any groups of people because of associated witchcraft beliefs.

Questions to the forum:

- How can we use this in the media?
- Have any of you on location been able to promote coverage in the press or media?

Patrick Musafiri: In the D.R. Congo, It is difficult to engage the media agencies, where a budget would be required. But utilisation of social media is an opportunity to reach many people, to get the message out that the UN has passed this resolution, and it is not acceptable to accuse children of witchcraft, nor to conduct ritual attacks.

Bassey Mbang: In Nigeria, I think the only thing we can still be doing is to use social media. Because, just like Patrick said, in Nigeria here for you to carry out such news items you have to pay the media organisations. Since funds are not around, we can just be using our hashtags, we can be using the social media, facebook, instagram, twitter, through whatsapp groups: we share with such groups. That is the only thing available for now. For the media organisations, it is not possible for now.

Joy Orowho–Adebayo: I think if you want to use the media, you have to kind of collaborate with them. It would be good if the media is used because it's going to reach a whole lot of people: people listening to the radio, those driving, in their homes, in their offices. So the cost would be really high. So then, it is something in which you have to collaborate with them, it is something that will involve funds, as Pastor Bassey says. I know there are some things on media already, but I know it is cost intensive here in Nigeria.

Carolyn Gent: I wonder whether BRCI have connections with the media already? Perhaps a journalist that they work with? We can talk more about this [in a meeting between SCWA and BRCI].

Comment on wider advocacy:

Susie Howe: It is good to involve the media, but the people that we really need to influence are the politicians, the state governors, even the police of course, and the judiciary. Those are the kinds of people who need to be made aware of this resolution. Some kind of advocacy [is needed] around the fact that this resolution has now been passed, and the implications of it. I'm wondering with our friends here, how they think they could share this resolution and the implications of it with state governors, the local police, and others who have some kind of influence.

Questions to the forum:

- Is there any way that our organisations can raise awareness of this resolution?
- How can we use it to start to open up a discussion about it, in the first instance?

Joy Orowho–Adebayo: When you mentioned advocacy, I think in an environment like ours that will really be a key way of driving these messages to those who are supposed to hear it: the politicians, those in the armed forces. I think advocacy will be a key way [to reach the influential] people.

Comment on relationships as basis for advocacy:

Susie Howe: I think it shows the importance of building relationships with key people, like the local governors and chiefs of police and people like that, much like Pastor Jean–Paul Aruna has been doing in Goma , and creating these “Synergies” of people who come from different parts of the community and have leadership influence — sharing with them, and building relationship with them. I would say, perhaps that's a starting place. One thing to think about: Who can I start building relationship with? What are local leaders and state leaders can we start to build relationships with? ...so that they build awareness of the work that we are doing among vulnerable children, and then to bring them on board as champions as well, to bring in this issue and to share with them what has happened.

Comment on intentions of the Human Rights Council:

Susie Howe: Interestingly enough, the resolution has requested that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights organises an expert global consultation on this, and brings a report to the UN, to submit a report to the Human Rights Council at its 52nd session. So the UN is really serious about this, and wants to see states acting on this.

We need to bring this information down to local level and use our understanding of this, as well as push it up to those who are in authority in our districts, in our states, in our nations so that they can come on board with this. And that is the work of advocacy, which is very much the work of God's people, isn't it? As Proverbs 31:8 says, "Speak up for the oppressed." So let's do it!

Closing Insights

Carolyn Gent: We are in fantastic relationship with everyone on this call, and it is such a privilege to work together on these issues.

Personal testimony of pastor

Closing the Forum Session, SCWA shared a video testimony of one of the pastors in Nigeria who had recently received training using "the Heart of the Matter" resource. Here we share her inspirational words and fresh motivation to make a difference.

Quote from pastor's testimony:

Honestly, it has been mind-blowing! I've been exposed to a platform where I've been able to see things from a different perspective in life, and that has enabled me to prepare my mind towards sharing what I've learnt with so many other people out there, beginning with my immediate congregation and then they will take that attitude into larger society. I'll use every opportunity that I have to reach out, to minister on different platforms, in church and outside, I will say to such people that I see the need for us to understand that every human being created by God has a purpose on this Earth right from the womb to adulthood. And I believe that if everyone was just [understanding] the same thing, I believe that God will help us to achieve so much outside.

For emphasis, like I said, I intend to reach out to my immediate congregation, as many as I can reach out to. I will organise programmes, in the midst of other programmes I will chip in this [training] package, and I trust that step by step, we will get out there to the larger society, starting with the mind shift of the thing, and helping them to understand that, as an individual, every child (whether biological or not of yours) whom you come across is important to God and has a destiny to fulfil. So [now we'll] put our hands together to ensure that we reach out to every single individual out there, children who are on the street are out there and exposed to all kind of vices in life. Every opportunity we have

let's do the little bit we can, and use every opportunity we get to ensure we achieve this sensitisation, God helping me.

Comment on testimony:

Carolyn Gent: Encouraging to hear from this female pastor who received training by our colleagues in Calabar. She talks about how it has totally changing her thinking, how she is already looking at how to share learning with her congregation and more broadly, and how she sees this as beginning a process of changing thinking around children accused of witchcraft, so those children are given the value that God places upon them, and that this is recognised by the community. I think that is super exciting.

Thank you!

Huge congratulations to the Calabar team for their work with this training, and also to Patrick Musafiri in Goma, whose training in Nyiragongo was excellent, and is having a positive impact. We place great value on all who are using this training to effect change in their communities. A huge “thank you” to colleagues on teams in Goma and Calabar for all your sacrificial work on this issue.

Thanks are also due to Dr. Tim Stabell for all his input along SCWA's journey, the experience he brings, and also many theological insights to strengthen our work. Your wisdom and guidance is very much appreciated.

Thanks to all for attending today, it has been a privilege to spend time with you all.

Dr. Tim Stabell was invited to close the forum with prayer.

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Thank you.