



Beleaguered Tanzanian Albinos Get Some Help from Canada

Tanzanian albinos face lives filled with fear, cancer and poor eye health.

Albinism is a genetic condition whereby people are born with little or no pigment in their eyes, skin or hair.

Many albinos suffer from terrible severe vision loss and skin cancers.

Not only must albinos shelter from the sun, now they must hide for their lives.

This year there has been a series of grisly murders in Tanzania. Albinos are targeted for body parts that are used in witchcraft, and killings continue despite government efforts to stamp out the practice.

On October 21, a nine-year-old albino girl was murdered in north-western Tanzania.

So far this year about 30 albinos have been killed in Tanzania, their arms, legs and hair wanted by witchdoctors for "get rich" potions.

According to the BBC, sorcery and the occult maintain a strong foothold, especially in the remote rural areas around the fishing and mining regions of Mwanza, on the shores of Lake Victoria.

In the face of all this horror, Seva Canada (www.seva.ca), an international eye care non-profit organization, and its partner in Tanzania, the Kilimanjaro Centre for Community Ophthalmology

(www.kcco.net) based in Moshi, have been trying to make the lives of albinos better by providing much needed eye care.

Mountain Equipment Co-op in Vancouver donated sunglasses which have been provided to albino children to protect their sensitive eyes.

"Sadly, people with albinism suffer from a range of eye problems including sensitivity to light," says Heather Wardle, Development Director at Seva Canada, who just returned from Tanzania.

"Prescription glasses, sunglasses and low vision aids provided by the Kilimanjaro Centre for Community Ophthalmology allow people with albinism to lead more normal lives and children to attend school," she added.

Albinism affects one in 20,000 people worldwide, but in Tanzania the prevalence appears to be much higher.

The Albino Association of Tanzania says that although just 4,000 albinos are officially registered in the country, they believe the actual number could be as high as 173,000.

Seva Canada and its partner in Africa, the Kilimanjaro Centre for Community Ophthalmology are seeking a regular supply of infant and children's eyeglass frames for the many children in eastern Africa, including albinos, who need prescription glasses.

For further information or interviews please contact:

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