



## **Press Release: IHRDA, GRASH sue Burkina Faso for failing to protect persons persecuted on witchcraft accusation**

***Ouagadougou, 28 November 2022:*** IHRDA and Burkinabe partner, *Groupe de Recherche-Action sur la Sécurité Humaine* (GRASH), 28 November 2022, sue Burkina Faso before the ECOWAS Court, on behalf of an elderly woman and her children, alleging Burkina Faso's failure to protect them from persecution and assault upon accusation of witchcraft.

According to the facts of the case, in November 2020, the elderly woman and her husband were accused of killing another woman's son through witchcraft. Following the accusation, a group of young people attacked the residence of the accused couple, killed and buried the husband, and burnt down their house and property, while the woman succeeded in escaping and relocating with her household several kilometres away from their place of habitual residence and farmlands. Though the incident was reported to local authorities and a case filed, no effective investigation has been done and the perpetrators remain unpunished, while the survivor and her children continue suffering significant material and immaterial damages.

Speaking during consultations with her Counsel, the woman, who is the lead Plaintiff said:

*"I am an old woman, and I was living a quiet life with my family in our village. But ever since the attack, I have been struggling even to feed, as I am now living many kilometres away from my farm, which was my only source of livelihood...I don't have the means and the energy to be going there regularly as before. I really wish that justice should be rendered and the perpetrators punished, so my children and I can at least reconstruct our lives and heal from the pain".*

The suit alleges that, due to the lack of effective investigation and prosecution of the perpetrators, Burkina Faso has violated the victims' right to remedy and access to justice, and has also failed in its obligation to protect the victims' right to life, property and shelter. These are rights and obligations enshrined in several human rights legal instruments binding on Burkina Faso, notably the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"This is the first case IHRDA is supporting in Burkina Faso, which aligns with IHRDA's strategic orientation to expand its geographic scope of intervention...One peculiarity of this case is the fact that it concerns the protection of elderly people, especially women, who are often associated with witchcraft in many parts of Africa. Human rights violation associated with accusation of witchcraft is a problematic IHRDA is seriously looking into", IHRDA Executive Director, Gaye Sowe, said upon filing of the case.

GRASH President, Ali Traoré, added that “justice needs to be done for this elderly woman and her children”.

The Plaintiffs request the ECOWAS Court to hold Burkina Faso responsible for the said human rights violations; to order Burkina Faso to pay the victims monetary compensation for damages suffered, and carry out an effective investigation, in view of punishing the perpetrators within a reasonable time.

###

**For more information:**

[IHRDA](#) is a pan–African non-governmental organisation working to promote human rights in Africa and improve the effectiveness of the African Human Rights system.

**Contact:** Eric Bizimana, Senior Legal Officer; Email: ebizimana@ihrda.org; Tel: +220 7751205

**GRASH** is a non-governmental organisation working to promote human rights and development in Burkina Faso.

**Contact:** Ali Traoré, President; Email: trali200@yahoo.fr; Tel:+226 70 59 08 75