

PART VIII

Muti Murder

One of the most horrifying forms of human trafficking occurs in the name of traditional medicine. Muti murder (muti is the word commonly used for traditional medicine in South Africa) involves abducting people, killing them, and harvesting their body parts for use in ritual or cult practices. Believers in these rituals hold that the use of human body parts is more potent than other muti and can bring about wealth, luck, and fertility. Identified victims in South Africa include babies and toddlers, young boys and girls, and adults; the victims are found missing body parts such as heads, hearts, kidneys, tongues, ears, breasts, and genitalia. Many female victims are raped beforehand.

Studies indicate that the human body parts used in traditional medicine in South Africa tend to come from persons killed in South Africa or in Mozambique. Experts estimate that somewhere between 12 to 300 muti murders occur per year in South Africa. Determining exact numbers is nearly impossible, as murders are not categorized by type. Moreover, by the time some potential muti murder victims are discovered, decomposition has occurred or predators have eaten at the body, so that determining the cause of death is difficult.

One challenge in addressing the problem is the strong community belief in traditional medicine. Someone who believes in a traditional healer will often consult with a healer before implementing recommendations from a physician. The government continues to meet with traditional healers to discuss the measures necessary to stop muti killings and the demand for rituals that in-

volve harvested human body parts. The immense trust in healers allows them to promote awareness far more effectively than anti-trafficking advocates could do alone. Experts believe that healers' involvement is crucial to raising awareness on the danger muti killings pose to those who practice traditional medicine.

CHAPTER 16

South Africa

Sometimes we rape them. We call it “washing the hands.”

—A SOUTH AFRICAN HUMAN TRAFFICKER

As is the case with all nations, human trafficking in South Africa cannot be properly evaluated in isolation from its specific culture, economy, and laws. Because South Africa has four times the GDP of its neighbors, it is an attractive destination for both migrants and traffickers. Insufficient control over the nation’s vast borders, lack of a comprehensive anti-trafficking law, and the demand for body parts used in traditional healing also contribute to South Africa’s unique trafficking scenario. Although South Africa is primarily a destination for human trafficking, it also serves as a transit nation, and its citizens are also trafficked both internally and abroad (NPA/ HSRC, 2010).

As HIV/AIDS becomes more of a concern among clients, the demand for underage children for commercial sexual exploitation is increasing in all of South Africa’s trafficking streams (NPA/HSRC, 2010). Social workers and officers of the Child Protection Unit (CPU) estimated in 2000 that there were 28,000 child prostitutes in South Africa (Molo Songololo, 2000). This statistic continues to be recounted in the media and expert reports even though the data is more than a decade old. According to Patric Solomons, director of the child advocacy group Molo Songololo, this is in part because South Africa does not have a central data collection in place. “As for the numbers . . . we have no idea how big the problem is,” Solomons said. Since 2000, according to Solomons, there has been an increase in the detection, investigation, and prosecution of child prostitution–related cases. Yet it is still a prevalent problem.