

**REPORT ON**

**REPORT ON INCREASE OF TARGETED  
HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN GHANA  
2024-2025**

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# REPORT ON INCREASE OF TARGETED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN GHANA 2024-2025

## Executive Summary

Pursuant to the protections guaranteed under the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, which provides for freedom from violence and discrimination for all persons, as well as ACHPR Resolution 275 of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which calls on states to prevent and address violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, all individuals are entitled to protection from such abuses. This report documents concerns raised by human rights Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) about the increase in violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics (SOGIES) in Ghana, with a particular focus on the northern part of the country.

The report examines the institution of traditional leadership and how its power dynamics have contributed to acts of violence and discrimination against citizens who are perceived to be sexual and gender minorities. It further analyses the impact of these practices on victims and highlights the broader human rights implications arising from them. The cases featured in this report were submitted to the Symbiosis Initiative Ghana's Legal Desk Project, including those shared on social media and tracked by another CSO, Rightify Ghana. This report further highlights specific instances of some of these practices and the institutional barriers to addressing them. It also proposes advocacy and policy reform pathways, including measures to penalize or prosecute perpetrators and provide remedies for victims.

## Introduction

Ghana inherited colonial-era laws that criminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity between men, laws that have since been further entrenched by the conservative influence of Western and local religious institutions and leaders.<sup>1</sup> Like many previously colonized places, gender diversity and sexual plurality existed in Ghana and was accepted and sometimes celebrated by several communities throughout and surpassing colonial rule.<sup>2</sup> After independence in 1957, the Ghanaian Criminal Code of 1960 criminalized the act of "unnatural carnal knowledge", defined as "sexual intercourse with a person in an un-natural manner or with an animal", which imposes up to three years in prison if found guilty. This law underlies the social stigma faced by LGBTQIA people.

Things became worse for gender and sexual minorities following a regional meeting hosted by the local anti-LGBTQ group, Coalition for Proper Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values, 2019 in Accra.<sup>3</sup> Just months later, the "Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill" was introduced in Parliament as a private members bill.<sup>4</sup> The public discourse that followed the introduction of this bill was so characterized by hate speech and misinformation that the then-sitting president, Nana Akufo-Addo, made a public statement calling for civil dialogue.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/god-has-a-new-africa-undercover-in-a-us-led-anti-lgbt-hate-movement/>

<sup>2</sup><https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/13640318.pdf>

On 28 February 2024, Ghana's parliament voted unanimously in favor of the bill, which has increased vigilante and police violence across the country. In the Northern region, those accused or suspected of association with the LGBTQ+ community, have been blamed for a wide range of issues including lack of rainfall.

## **Understanding Some of the Practices**

The narrative that same sex relationship is “Un African” is a claim that contradicts historical and anthropological evidence. Religious teachings, both Islamic and Christian, have labelled homosexuality as sinful and abominable. This has given traditional leaders who are equally devoted religious people the incentive to act as enforcers of these teachings often through inhumane and violent means: in some cases, conversion therapy is proposed as in the case of the Ghanaian anti-LGBTQ+ bill.

While there is general homophobia due to the same religious reasons, there are also organized groups under the name of Chief palaces who violently seize and assault their victims often resulting in false confessions. Based on these coerced confessions, victims are then accused with little to no evidence. The victims are fined for cash, produce, and/or livestock. The fines are usually based on the purported magnitude of the accused offence based on the chiefs' (?) own unsanctioned beliefs and judgement. Consequently, contravening Article 17 of the 1992 Constitution guaranteeing every citizen's Equality and Freedom from Discrimination.

### **Case study 1.**

According to cases reported by a victim and witnesses, Yakubu, a victim, received a WhatsApp message from an acquaintance who asked him of his whereabouts and he responded that he is home. According to Yakubu, in the next hour after he responded to the message, a group of armed men apprehended him in his home in the presence of his wife and children. The group accused him of homosexuality as they assaulted him with various weapons until they finally dragged him to the Guikpe Naa Chief's palace in Tamale. Upon Yakubu's arrival at the chief palace, he met his friend who was also detained at the palace for homosexuality. He learned that his friend's phone was used to message him and to reach him. The friend was coerced by the same group to reveal names of other LGBTIQ+ people he knows or the group was going to go through his phone to retrieve any contacts they perceive to be his sexual partner.

It was through this kind of entrapment that Yakubu found himself apprehended, assaulted, and sent to the chief's palace. At the chief's palace, Yakubu was asked to pay a fine of GHS 5,000.00 and 1 male goat for defiling the land. Yakubu paid what was asked and he was left to deal with his wounds and trauma. Many people perceived to be part of the LGBTIQ+ community have had similar encounters at different Chief's palaces.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/god-has-a-new-africa-undercover-in-a-us-led-anti-lgbt-hate-movement/>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr28/4677/2021/en/>

## Case study 2. A Story of Entrapment and Brutality

- On 19<sup>th</sup> May 2025, at 8:41pm Adams was visited in his house by 3 men he had never met in his neighbourhood, they came with someone Adams knew called Issakah to ask Adams some questions.
- After a few minutes of interrogation, they accused Adams of homosexuality and started slapping him and kicking him with all sorts of items they could find around. No one could come to Adams' rescue because he's being accused of homosexuality, until they finally dragged him to the Chief's palace.
- At the Chief's palace, Adams discovered Issakah was entrapped on facebook and was also kidnapped for days. Once kidnappers couldn't get any money from him, they coerced him to mention names of people in his contacts and that's how Adams' name came up.
- Unfortunately for Adams, his landlord came to testify that he believes the homosexuality accusation because Adams has a gang of [male?] friends who visit him in the house.
- Both Adams and Issakah were fined Ghc 3000 and a lamb by the traditional authorities who oversee judgment in the palace, mostly headed by the chief. They were both set free to go deal with their wounds and trauma after all payments were made.

### Systemic Entrapment

#### A Pattern of Abuse

- Victims are entrapped through digital surveillance, coerced confessions, and peer betrayal.
- Fines are arbitrarily imposed amounts vary based on supposed "severity."
- Livelihoods are destroyed, families broken, and mental health shattered.
- No legal grounds or constitutional basis support these actions.

### Highlights

#### Traditional Power and Misuse

- Chiefs and traditional leaders are meant to preserve cultural order and resolve conflicts.
- In many communities, these roles now include enforcing moral codes often based on religion and through unofficial justice systems.
- Accused individuals are taken to the "Chief's palaces" without legal due process.

### Nature of Accusation to Punishment

- Accusations are often based on hearsay, digital communication, or coerced confessions.
- Victims are forcibly seized, physically assaulted, and publicly humiliated.
- No legal representation is allowed. There is no formal investigation.

*For safety reasons, we have changed the names.*

## Key Findings

- Fines create an avenue for extortion.
- Victims are only set free after fines are paid fully.
- Monetary fines range between **GHC 500.00 – GHC 10,000.00** per individual.
- Livestock equivalent ranges between **GHC 100.00 – GHC 1,000.00**.

**Table 1: Accumulated Money Fined (GHC)**

11 out of 20 cases under study

| Case # | Cumulative Money (GHC) |
|--------|------------------------|
| 1      | 0                      |
| 2      | 500                    |
| 3      | 2100                   |
| 4      | 3600                   |
| 5      | 3800                   |
| 6      | 18800                  |
| 7      | 18800                  |
| 8      | 23300                  |
| 9      | 29300                  |
| 10     | 34100                  |
| 11     | 34100                  |

**Table 2: Total Livestock Fined**

| Livestock Type | Total Count |
|----------------|-------------|
| Cock           | 2           |
| Goat           | 2           |
| Sheep          | 3           |
| Ram            | 4           |
| Lamb           | 1           |

Report Summary – Based on 11 of 20 Cases Studied

## **Impact of incidents on victims and related human rights violations**

### **1. Physical and Psychological Harm**

Victims suffered severe physical violence, including beatings and forced drugging, leading to injuries, long-term health complications, and in some cases permanent disability. These abuses also resulted in profound psychological trauma such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), fear, shame, and loss of self-worth. Fear of exposure or retaliation often prevents victims from seeking medical or psychological care.

### **2. Economic Deprivation and Loss of Livelihood**

Arbitrary and excessive fines imposed in cash and livestock placed victims under significant financial strain. These penalties frequently resulted in debt, loss of income, and long-term economic insecurity, particularly where victims were already economically vulnerable and where punishments lacked any legal basis.

### **3. Social Stigmatization and Family Disruption**

Accusations of homosexuality exposed victims to public shame, social exclusion, and rejection by family and community members. In many cases, victims were forced to relocate, live in hiding, or endure strained family relationships. The involvement of spouses and children in arrests or assaults deepened emotional harm and contributed to long-term family instability.

### **4. Breakdown of Trust in Justice and Governance Systems**

The participation of traditional authorities in violent and extrajudicial practices eroded trust in both customary and state institutions. Victims were deterred from reporting abuses or seeking legal redress due to fear of reprisals, disbelief, or further victimisation, thereby perpetuating cycles of impunity and injustice.

## **Human Rights Violations amount to Legal Violations:**

These practices constitute multiple violations under Ghana's 1992 Constitution and international human rights law:

### **1. Right to Equality and Freedom from Discrimination [Article 17 of the 1992 Constitution]**

Victims were targeted solely on the basis of perceived sexual orientation or association, constituting discriminatory treatment.

### **2. Right to Human Dignity [Article 15 of the Constitution]**

Beatings, humiliation, forced confessions, and extortion violate the inherent dignity of the human person.

### **3. Freedom from Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment**

Physical assault, forced drugging, threats, and coercion meet the threshold of torture and inhuman treatment under international law.

### **4. Right to Personal Liberty and Security [Article 14]**

Arbitrary arrest, detention, and transport to chief's palaces without legal authority or due process violate the right to liberty.

### **5. Right to Privacy**

Threats to search phones, coercive extraction of personal information, and entrapment violate privacy rights.

### **6. Right to Fair Trial and Due Process**

Victims are accused, judged, and punished without evidence, legal representation, or access to a court of law, undermining the rule of law.

### **7. Freedom of Expression and Association**

Victims are punished for perceived identity or association, suppressing their ability to express themselves or form relationships

## Reporting process and Methodology

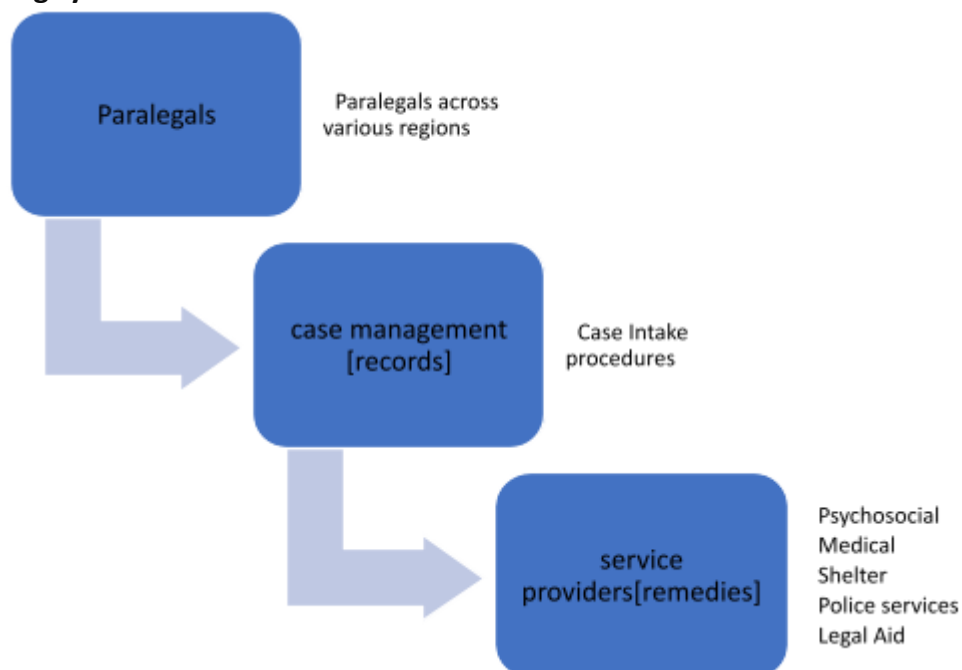
CBOs working in the forefront of such human rights violations, have individually developed a reporting mechanism that allow them to receive cases from their various communities, including the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice [CHRAJ] hosting a nationwide online reporting system.

Over the period of four years, Symbiosis Initiative has developed a program that specifically addresses gender and sexual orientation-based violence [SGBV] providing legal aid and other remedies to survivors of such human rights violations. It's through these programs that we record all these cases through our paralegals across the various regions of the country (see Figure 1). In this report Rightify Ghana contributed to the documentation of the 20 cases involving traditional authorities that are featured in the report.

Once a case is reported to us through safe and confidential reporting channels, we take survivors through 'Case Intake' procedures. We then assist them to make a complaint at the appropriate police station while we also provide survivors with remedies like psychosocial counselling, medical care, short term shelter and legal counsel/aid in cases that require these remedies. In most cases the barriers to any form of accountability begins at the police station.



Figure 1: Symbiosis Initiative Ghana's Case management process for human rights violation reporting system.



## **Engagement With National Human Rights Institutions**

In an attempt to enquire from the national human rights institution, CHRAJ, upon countless referrals, the Northern regional director of CHRAJ agreed to look into the cases should any of these cases be reported to their reporting systems.

In Ghana, several interrelated social, cultural, and institutional factors can discourage individuals from reporting human rights abuses committed by anyone, especially a traditional leader. Traditional leaders are powerful figures in many communities, often holding both symbolic and practical authority. Victims may fear retaliation, social exclusion, or other consequences if they report a traditional leader. Such actions can be seen as challenging or disrespecting deeply rooted traditions. This fear of reprisals is often compounded by the high level of reverence traditionally accorded to chiefs, which culturally discourages questioning their actions.

Another significant barrier is the general lack of awareness, particularly in rural or less-educated areas, about human rights and the existence or role of CHRAJ. Many people may not recognize certain experiences as violations, especially when harmful practices are culturally normalized. This lack of knowledge intersects with high levels of illiteracy and complex bureaucratic processes that make navigating the formal complaint system difficult, especially when CHRAJ offices are far from rural communities or when legal processes seem inaccessible or intimidating.

Finally, practical concerns such as the lack of protection for complainants, the influence of chiefs in local governance, and internalized oppression further suppress reports. Victims may believe their complaints will not be taken seriously or fear further victimization, especially in tightly-knit communities where anonymity is difficult. In some cases, individuals have internalized the belief that chiefs are infallible, leading to silence, shame, or resignation rather than resistance. Together, these factors create a complex environment where reporting human rights abuses by chiefs is not only challenging but often socially and personally risky.

## **Conclusion And Recommendation**

(The Need for Change, Advocating for Justice and Dignity)

### **1. Advance Legal Protection and Accountability**

Provide legal aid and strategic litigation to challenge discriminatory laws and unlawful arrests while monitoring and documenting violations to support court cases and policy reform to ensure that protection of dignity and safety is grounded in constitutional and human rights law, not dependent on criminal provisions.

### **2. Strengthen and Harmonise Existing Protection and Reporting Mechanisms**

Coordinate and harmonise existing confidential reporting systems operated by CSOs and state institutions, including CHRAJ, to ensure survivors of violence can safely report abuses and access support. These mechanisms should be integrated into a responsive protection

framework linking trauma-informed mental health care, medical assistance, safe shelter, and legal services. Where gaps are identified, targeted enhancements—such as improved coordination, accessibility, and rapid response capacity—should be implemented to better protect individuals at immediate risk and reduce fear-driven silence.

### 3. Engage and Educate Chieftaincy Institutions on Human Rights Obligations

Initiate structured human rights education and dialogue programs specifically targeted at chiefs, palace authorities, and traditional councils in the Northern Regions. These initiatives should emphasise constitutional protections—particularly equality before the law, freedom from discrimination, and protection from arbitrary detention and violence. Programs should be implemented in partnership with the National House of Chiefs, Regional Houses of Chiefs, civil society organisations, and human rights bodies such as CHRAJ. The aim should be to:

- Promote understanding among traditional authorities that no accusation justifies violence, arbitrary detention, or extrajudicial fines.
- Clarify the limits of customary authority where actions conflict with constitutional rights and national law.
- Encourage chiefs to publicly denounce violence carried out in the name of cultural or religious enforcement.
- Establish channels for collaboration between traditional leaders and state justice institutions to ensure disputes are handled lawfully and without abuse.

Community-level education programs should complement these efforts, but the primary focus should remain on transforming practices within chieftaincy institutions that currently enable or tolerate such abuses.

### 4. Strengthen Institutional Capacity and Oversight

Initiate dialogue to train police, judiciary, and healthcare workers on non-discrimination and human rights standards and establish oversight mechanisms to address abuse by public officials to integrate inclusive service standards into public institutions, ensuring state institutions actively protect, rather than harm gender and sexual minorities.

#### **Call to Action—What You Can Do**

- Share this report with groups and institutions that can help.
- Support human rights CBOs in Ghana.
- Advocate for legal protection for gender and sexual minorities in Ghana
- Listen to and stand with survivors.

#### **Contact for questions/clarification**

**Name:** Fischere Kwofie

**Email:** [e.d@symbiosisinitiativegh.org](mailto:e.d@symbiosisinitiativegh.org)

**Designation:** Executive Director