

Reporting on Satan: Devil worship in Kenya?

by [Edward Miller](#) in the [November 17, 1999](#) issue

Kenyans were sent reeling by a report made public in September by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Cult of Devil Worship in Kenya. Reactions range from ridicule to alarm. Others wonder what the real reasons are behind the sudden release of the report after four years of delay and secrecy.

The report, commissioned by President Daniel arap Moi in 1994 and completed the following year, contends that "devil worship" is widespread in Kenya. Schools and certain churches are said to be its sanctuaries, and the practice, it is claimed, reaches high up in government and business circles. An assistant government minister and his wife are named as "known Satanists."

The most controversial aspect of the report comes with the identification of certain groups with "the cult of devil worship." Freemasons are at the top of a list that includes Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishnas and Moonies. Rudolph Steiner schools, the Theosophical Society and Lucifer's Golfing Society (an international organization whose patron is the duke of Edinburgh) were also named.

Satanic rituals allegedly practiced by these groups include using snakes, drinking human blood and eating human flesh. They are also accused of sexual abuse and human sacrifice.

Local media quickly honed in on the report's allegations that Satanists are wealthy and prominent people "who drive expensive cars," reflecting the common Kenyan's mistrust of the country's elite. A popular cartoonist showed a figure labeled "leader" as a hooded Satanist. The devil's presence in Kenya's schools was also an easy sell, as there has been a spate of school violence throughout the country. "Satan has been infecting our schoolchildren in 1999. There is no other way to understand it," says one evangelical Christian pastor.

But the accusations leveled against established international groups? Notably absent in the report, say local observers, is hard evidence, with the commissioners relying on sweeping statements and vague interviews with "reformed Satanists" who tell of being lured by rich strangers connected to this or that organization to observe human sacrifice in dark houses.

Many Kenyans, unsure of the report's allegations, hold on to their own faith. But some conservative Christians, attached to the numerous evangelical and charismatic churches that have sprung up in Kenya in the past ten years, view the commission's report as fact, including the accusations against international organizations. They say the answer lies in purging the country of Satan's presence through continuous prayer.

Some are responding to the report's bizarre contention that Kenyan money has Satanic symbols on it, including snakes and "naked people holding onto a monument." (Apparently they are referring to an illustration of Kenyan flag raising inspired by Joe Rosenthal's "Old Glory"-which depicts fully clothed figures.)

Myra Juma, a Kenyan who works with an international development organization, says the report is completely true. "In my view, someone who is worshiping anything other than God through Jesus Christ is a devil worshiper," she said.

Some would say that that is exactly the stance of the presidential commission. Overwhelmingly clerical and Christian-affiliated, the commissioners consider a Satanic cult "any group or institution that stands in opposition to the good of society." Such a definition can be easily misused, say some Kenyan intellectuals, who accuse the commission of a witch-hunt against anyone who goes against mainstream Christianity. Some call the report "the height of naïveté," and a prominent Christian cleric dismisses the commission's work as a waste of public money.

A spokesman for the Supreme Council of Muslims in Kenya, which speaks for the country's 315 Islamic organizations, says they were not even consulted throughout the whole inquiry, though close to 10 million Kenyans profess an Islamic faith. "Certainly one could say that the whole process has had a Christian bias," he said.

Local lawyer Kathurima M'Inoti opposes the inquiry from a purely legalistic standpoint, saying that devil worship is neither illegal nor unconstitutional. While law and order and public safety must be upheld, the commission simply condemned

organizations on the basis of suspicion only, says M'Inoti.

The accused groups dismiss the allegations as hogwash. The Freemasons define themselves as "a society of men concerned with moral and spiritual values," while the Theosophical Society says that its goal is the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science. Scandal has never been attached to its name since its registration in Kenya in 1905.

Meanwhile, Kenyans are wondering why the report was released at this particular time. Clergyman Timothy Njoya and others suspect that the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) party is trying to avert attention from the country's economic crisis and recent political upheavals-including a parliamentary vote of no confidence in the government and controversial civil service restructuring.

For Catholic Archbishop Nicodemous Kirima, the chair of the commission, the accusations raised against the commission are irrelevant. At a recent fund-raising event, the archbishop said devil worship is real and suggested that it has been brought in by Westerners "under the guise of the New World Order."

As the accusations and counteraccusations build and the debate takes on an absurd nature, Kenyans are increasingly dismissing or adhering to the allegations of "devil worship" in the nation. Writer Phillip Ochieng claims that the report is "potentially oppressive," with the commission's partial approach leaving Kenyans' constitutional right to freedom of worship in question.

One observer said that the whole affair portrays Kenya negatively to the rest of the world, and implies that Kenya is an ignorant and voodoo-ridden society. But he raises the question others have: Is this just an attempt to deflect Kenyans' attention from something serious?