



Ghana – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 4 September 2013

Any information regarding the consequences of refusing to accept a chieftaincy position in Ghana.

A country advice document published by the Refugee Review Tribunal of Australia, in response to the query “Is there any information on killings, violence towards or rejection of people who refuse to take up the Kontihene, or repercussions for those who refuse to give up Christianity?”, states:

“Many reliable sources suggest that among the Akan there are no physically harsh repercussions for those who refuse to become Kontihene, and any punishments are usually of a social nature.” (Refugee Review Tribunal of Australia (19 May 2010) *Ghana – GHA36553 – Stool of the Kontihene – Seikwa village – Christians – Traditional beliefs – State protection – Police*, p.7)

Referring to information provided by Dr Phil Bartle, a former academic at the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in Ghana, this document states:

“Dr Bartle indicated that people who decline the stool of the Kontihene do not face serious danger as a result, advising that:

The one who refuses does so by running away and staying away for a few years until the issue blows over. He will get scorn but no physical punishment. He is at a disadvantage because he could not easily appear in the chief’s court to argue a case or plead a ruling...” (ibid, pp.7-8)

This document also states:

“This information broadly accords with two research responses from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) that cite academic experts on Akan culture. To summarise key points, the advice was that forced enstoolment was rare in modern times and elders had ‘little resource’ to punish a person who refused to become a chief. Punishments were usually of a social nature and could be harsh, for example social ostracism or banishment. One expert advised that even those who followed non-indigenous religions such as Christianity might fear that their clan’s ancestors would punish them for refusing a stool. Overall, it was unlikely that the person who refused a position of tradition office would ‘suffer any significant consequence’ and though they might ‘incur the wrath of the elders, ...[there was] no evidence of any harm done as a result.’” (ibid, p.8)

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for information on the consequences of refusing a chieftaincy position quotes an Associate Professor of anthropology at York University in Toronto as follows:

“It’s a major honour and duty to become such a personage: because you are embodying, for good or for ill, depending on how you carry out your duties, the well-being and reputation of your group, including affecting their spiritual well-being too. The ‘consequences’ of refusing/misbehaving, then, increase with the greater level of chiefship concerned. On the personal level, a person refusing/turning-down such a position ... may be socially ostracised (they are putting their kin group and community at disadvantage and risk, and may also be costing them economic benefits, so life thereafter for that person may be quite unpleasant), perhaps driven away.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (16 August 2012) *GHA104154.E - Ghana: Consequences of refusing a fetish priest or chieftaincy position, and whether there is state protection available*)

Referring to the usual method for avoiding a chieftaincy position the Associate Professor states:

“The usual method for a person who does not want to accept an offered office is to travel so as to avoid the possibility of being offered the position. The elders are quite aware of this method, and incorporate it into their deliberations. [In] their minds, it is preferable that not many contenders, who will have different groups of supporters within the clan, are around to mess up the replacement process (e.g., enstoolment). To maintain their pride and face, the persons running away will exaggerate the danger to themselves of refusing a proffered office. ...There is no practice of punishing persons for running away before being offered a position as chief or elder, including female positions such as Queen Mother. If the chosen person is not bright enough to run away, and wants to refuse office, the usual practice is for him or her to offer a sheep to sacrifice to pacify the annoyed ancestors, and that is the end of it. There is no need for state protection because there is no punishment. The disappointed elders may express their irritation, but it happens so often, they usually sigh and are resigned to the fact.” (ibid)

The Associate Professor further states:

“Conflicts in a selection process mostly arise from competition between two or several candidates, but in some cases, which in my experience are much more rare, a person, who might be the most (or only) eligible candidate for the office, refuses the candidacy and is pressured by his community to accept it. Some of the so-called born-again Christians reject chieftaincy because of the ritual duties involved (i.e., offering sacrifices to the ancestors and deities). Such cases have been around since the early days of Christian conversion (19th and early 20th centuries). More recently, I have talked with immigrant men who refuse to visit their home towns or villages in Ghana, because allegedly they would be ‘kidnapped’ and installed as chiefs against their own will. In these cases, the chiefly title is seen as something that would restrict their movement.” (ibid)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

References:

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (16 August 2012) *GHA104154.E Ghana: Consequences of refusing a fetish priest or chieftaincy position, and whether there is state protection available*

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Sources Consulted:

Country of Origin Research and Information (CORI)

European Country of Origin Information Network

Google

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Lexis Nexis

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database

UNHCR Refworld