

girls in the *orpaillage* communities (usually Ghanaian or **Togolese**) may have come with a person who promised them work in a petty trade. Once at the mining site, however, many of these foreign girls are abandoned and turn to prostitution in order to survive.

Virtually all gold-mining communities in the Sahel are in remote, exceedingly poor rural areas. They are rough places without sanitation, health services and regular access to clean water. These unorganized and usually temporary settlements have virtually no public facilities. Schools, if they exist, are many kilometres away. (*rimmrights.org*)

Legislation Failure

The law does not necessarily make much difference when it comes to child labour in Guinea and Mauritania, where the worst forms of child labour persist despite it being banned by law, leading child protection experts to call for a better understanding of the dynamics behind it.

Mauritania: In Mauritania the law prohibits putting children under 14 to work, and penalises those who are guilty of exploiting minors. But in reality, according to a late September report by the International Trade Unions Federation (ITUC) under-14s continue to be sent to work, including some in “slave-like” conditions.

While most of the children are girls working as domestics for families, boys are often forced to beg; or are sent to work in the construction industry, on buses as money-collectors, or in criminal gangs. They are also forced to beg by Koranic teachers who are supposedly giving them a religious education - as is the case with hundreds of thousands of children across West Africa. In rural areas, boys work in the fields or herd animals.

Domestics work on average 10-hour days, while those working as beggars or in agriculture may work as many as 16 hours. Of 265 children interviewed, just under half said they were beaten by their bosses.

A long tradition of slavery complicates the situation. A law was passed in 2007 forbidding slavery but it is not rigorously enforced. One fifth of the Mauritanian population is affected by slavery in one form or another, according to a 2009 study by NGO SOS Slavery.

Guinea: In Guinea, despite legislation banning work for under-16s, “children carry out dangerous work in farms, in mines and in fisheries.” According to the ITUC, some children in artisanal mines work 15-hour-days, seven days a week, from age five.

Child trafficking is also a problem: moving children across borders into forced begging and other activities is still prevalent, though it has declined in recent years.

ITUC calls on both governments to more rigorously impose child labour laws and penalize individuals and organizations that do not comply, while recognizing that capacity in ministries remains very low.

Child labour is commonplace in poor rural societies in West Africa, as it is a way of training children and assuring them jobs in the future. In Guinea, for example, “fostering” or giving a child to a family as an apprentice, is considered beneficial to the child.

As Olivier Feneyrol, regional adviser for NGO *Terre des Hommes* in West Africa once put it to *IRIN*: “Children have been moving around the region for centuries and working just as long. That is the cultural reality here.”

“The debate on this issue is contentious,” says Mariama Penda Diallo, head of international relations, solidarity and humanitarian action at the Trade Union of Workers of Guinea (USTG), “because people say that it’s better to place the child from an early age so they can learn how to work,” she said.

Most poor urban families have no choice but to send their children to work, added Niang in Mauritania. “With the rural exodus, many families have settled in slums with their children. In the absence of public strategies to look after them, poor parents have no alternative but to send their children to work.”

For the ITUC the priorities are clear: it recommends investigating instances of children being forced into work to pay for their religious education; more prosecutions of those individuals who force children to work; turning the Mauritania anti-slavery law from theory into practice; and expanding Guinea’s child labour law to include children involved in unpaid, temporary, contract work. (*UN humanitarian and news analysis service, IRIN 10/10*)

CONSERVATION

Western Black Rhino Extinct

Re-educating those who adhere to irrational beliefs could help save other species.

The Western Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis longipes*) has officially been declared extinct. The subspecies of the White Rhino in central Africa, the Northern White Rhino (*Ceratotherium*

Religion

Papal “Pledge for Africa”

Pope Benedict XVI ended his second trip to Africa on November 20th with a mass for tens of thousands in the voodoo heartland of **Benin** and by issuing a grand vision for his Church’s future on the continent.

For the Sunday mass, some 50,000 people filled a stadium in Cotonou, the economic capital of Benin, a country considered both a heartland of voodoo and a bastion of Catholicism and where the two religions often mix. Officials estimated another 30,000 people watched from outside the stadium, with the service projected on to giant screens.

The previous day, the Pope had signed off on a roadmap for the Roman Catholic Church in Africa at a basilica in the city of Ouidah, a centre of voodoo. The document, an apostolic exhortation called “The Pledge for Africa” containing conclusions from a 2009 synod of African bishops, includes peace, reconciliation and justice as its main message. He handed the roadmap over to bishops from throughout the continent on the 20th.

It calls for good governance and the abolition of the death penalty while denouncing abuses, particularly against women and children, and describing AIDS as a mainly ethical problem that requires a medical response. Changes in behaviour are needed to combat the disease, including sexual abstinence and rejection of promiscuity, it adds.

The Catholic Church’s position on AIDS and the use of condoms has long been controversial and carefully scrutinised, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, home to nearly 70% of the world’s HIV cases. Benedict singled out those suffering with AIDS or other illnesses during Sunday’s mass, expressing solidarity with them.

The pope’s visit to the country was heavy in symbolism, in a region that served as a major slave-trading centre and coming 150 years after what is considered the evangelisation of Benin by missionaries. Slaves departing from Ouidah and elsewhere took their traditional voodoo beliefs with them and transplanted them in the Americas.

Benedict’s visit also occurred with the Roman Catholic Church facing a major challenge from evangelical movements that have made huge gains on the continent, attracting hundreds of thousands of followers. At the same time, Africa also has the world’s fastest-growing number of Catholics. (*IRIN 20/11*)

simum cottoni) is currently teetering on the brink of extinction and has been listed as Possibly Extinct in the Wild.

“Human beings are stewards of the earth and we are responsible for

protecting the species that share our environment,” says Simon Stuart, Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission. “In the case of both the Western Black Rhino and the Northern White Rhino the situation could have had very different results if the suggested conservation measures had been implemented. These measures must be strengthened now, specifically managing habitats in order to improve breeding performance, preventing other rhinos from fading into extinction.”

Several conservation successes have already been achieved including the Southern White Rhino subspecies (*Ceratotherium simum simum*), which has increased from a population of less than 100 at the end of the 19th century, to an estimated wild population of over 20,000.

Reptiles make up a significant component of biodiversity, particularly in dry land habitats and on islands around the world. In recent years, many more reptile species have been assessed including most of those found in **Madagascar**. The current Red List reveals that an alarming 40% of Madagascar's terrestrial reptiles are threatened. The 22 Madagascar species currently identified as Critically Endangered, which include chameleons, geckoes, skinks and snakes, are now a conservation challenge. This new information helps inform biodiversity planning and allows for an evaluation of the protection that protected areas in Madagascar offer reptiles. Encouragingly, there are new conservation areas being designated in Madagascar that will help conserve a significant proportion of Critically Endangered species, such as Tarzan's Chameleon (*Calumma tarzan*), the Bizarre-nosed Chameleon (*Calumma hafahafa*) and the Limbless Skink (*Paracantias fasika*). Because of their IUCN Red List status, species which have traditionally been overlooked in conservation efforts, such as the Endangered gecko *Paroedura masobe* and *Uroplatus pietschmanni* will now be featured more prominently in future plans. (*iucn.org 10/11*)

Environmental groups are calling on Asian investors and consumers to change the practices that harm local ecosystems and biodiversity. As the trial of **South African** game farmer **Dawie Groenewald** and his partners accused of running a rhinoceros-horn poaching syndicate continued on September 30th, the local branch of the World Wildlife Fund asked **China, Vietnam** and **Thailand** to counter misconceptions about the horn's medicinal properties and reduce demand. Vietnamese officials in South Africa prom-

ised to fight the criminal networks in the trade.

The South African authorities have already arrested 165 people linked to rhino killings in 2011. The most sensational was the July arrest of **Chumlong Lemtongthai**, a Thai national whom the authorities accuse of using women illegally trafficked into the country to smuggle out rhino horn. (*Africa-Asia Confidential, October*)

Baby Gorillas Poached

Baby gorilla trafficking in eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo** appears to be on the rise according to the Congolese Wildlife Authorities (ICCN) following the recent rescue of a poached infant gorilla.

This latest incident is the fourth since April; the highest number of baby gorillas on record confiscated from poachers in a single year.

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“We are very concerned about a growing market for baby gorillas that is feeding a dangerous trafficking activity in rebel controlled areas of eastern DRC,” said Virunga National Park Warden Emmanuel de Merode at park headquarters in Rumangabo, north of Goma. “We are powerless to control the international trade in baby gorillas, but our rangers are doing everything they can to stamp it out on the ground.” (*Catholic Information Service for Africa, Goma 11/10*)

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