

Last Updated: Friday, 02 October 2020, 09:33 GMT

- English
- | [Español](#)
- | [Русский](#)



-
- [UNHCR](#)
 - [Country Positions](#)
 - [Policies and Positions](#)
 - [Thematic Guidelines](#)
 -
 - [News](#)
 - [Statistics and Operational Data](#)
 - [Research](#)
 - [Website](#)
- [Laws](#)
 - [1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#)
 - [1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees](#)
 - [1969 OAU Refugee Convention](#)
 - [Cartagena Declaration on Refugees](#)
 - [EU acquis](#)
 - [National Legislation](#)
 - [Statelessness / Nationality](#)
 - [1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons](#)
 - [1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness](#)
 - [Nationality law](#)
- [Case Law](#)
- [Country Information](#)
 - [Country News](#)
 - [Country Profiles](#)
 - [Country Reports](#)
 - [Maps](#)
- [Browse by](#)
 - [A-Z Index](#)
 - [Document Type](#)
 - [Publisher](#)
 - [Topic](#)
 -
 - [Categories](#)
 - [Country Information](#)
 - [Legal Information](#)
 - [Policy Documents](#)
 - [Reference Documents](#)
- [Resources](#)
 - [Emergency Handbook](#)

- [External Links](#)
- [Protection Starter Kit](#)
- [Standards and Training](#)
- [Refworld Personalization](#)
- [UNOG Library](#)

- [My Profile](#)

Log in

☐ Remember Me

[Forgot password?](#) [Register](#)

- [Home»](#)
- [Browse by Publisher»](#)
- [Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada»](#)
- Ghana

- [Email this document](#)
- [Printable version](#)



Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Ghana: Consequences of refusing to assume an inherited position of tribal or clan chief; state protection available to the individual (2004-2006)

Publisher	Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
Author	Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa
Publication Date	11 October 2006
Citation / Document Symbol	GHA101613.E
Reference	7
Cite as	Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, <i>Ghana: Consequences of refusing to assume an inherited position of tribal or clan chief; state protection available to the individual (2004-2006)</i> , 11 October 2006, GHA101613.E, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/45f147372f.html [accessed 2 October 2020]
Disclaimer	This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

An instructor of sociology at Camosun College in Victoria, British Columbia and former senior lecturer at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana who obtained his PhD in sociology and anthropology at the University of Ghana provided the following information to the Research Directorate in correspondence dated 27 July 2006.

The choice of a clan head, or chief, based upon ancestor homage, is different from the choice of a priest or priestess, literally a possessed person, based upon a god "choosing" new medium. Usually a god, or the office of priest and the paraphernalia, is owned corporately by a clan, and the god will "choose" (possess) a member of that clan. The end result, therefore, is a huge similarity in selection of successor.

Succession for [the] head of clan is by election by the elders of that clan who choose among several candidates on the basis [of] which one can bring the most resources to the stool (symbol of office).

That is why, today, the more important and powerful offices are filled by educated and wealthy persons, including successful lawyers and other professionals, senior civil servants, and business owners.

The holding of office is time consuming, and certainly takes resources, as an elder or chief must provide refreshments for visitors and subordinate office holders, and must spend long hours hearing sometimes complicated cases of dispute.

Therefore, there is a resistance by young persons, especially those who are still studying and those have not reached what they consider the pinnacle of their professional career, to accept an offered office, and that reluctance is greater for lower positions in the overall hierarchy.

Meanwhile, the elders seeking an office holder want the most highly educated, and potentially wealthy and powerful candidates, in their own right, to be the office holders.

Most other excuses for a person refusing an offered office, such as being Christian and not wanting to participate in traditional ancestor homage and recognition of local deities, are less important in the overall scheme of things. The people of Southern Ghana are notable syncretists, being able to accommodate many, often incompatible (in our eyes), religious beliefs.

...

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.

Please note that the word "tribal" is not appropriate.

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

In correspondence dated 1 August 2006, an associate professor of Anthropology at York University in Toronto who has conducted field research in Ghana including observing various rituals performed in Ghana, provided the following information to the Research Directorate:

Some people in the community cannot become Chief/Priest [for the following reasons]: because they are not a member of the inheriting/"owning" kin-group; because they are circumcised; because they are not literate enough, etc. There are rules, at all levels of Chiefship, these chieftaincies increasing in import[ance] as one moves upwards in the social organization from (a) village chief/odikro; (b) clan head (abusua panyin); (c) Sub-Chief in the traditional ethnic-group's political organization; to (d) Paramount ("tribal") Chief (and some groups, all the Akan and some others, also have the position of "Queen-Mother" too). [S]uch major Chiefs (Nana, singular; Nananom, plural) each have a Stool and other regalia, often gold-decorated such as armlets, horn-blowers, "state"-umbrella holders, sword-bearers, palanquin-carriers, etc. 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 (without "good," i.e., community-acceptable reason: e.g., I knew a man who stepped down from a major chiefship and the community, with regret nevertheless accepted the decision, because they saw the merit of his "reason," which was that he did not have much formal education, was illiterate and felt that put h[imself] and his people at a disadvantage vis-à-vis other chiefs, people and Government) 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. [F]urther[more], even if they themsel[ves] are ... Christian or ... Muslim, from cultural belief, they can reasonably expect to be subject to spiritual/health "punishment" for not doing their duty. [For example], they can be "worried"/anxious/stressed-out in the likely fact that their clan's ancestors will seek to punish them, and/or that certain shamans/gods may seek their downfall, and/or that "witchcraft" may be worked against them ... and preying on their mind, even should they travel far away, to "get away from" their group and duty. [T]heir action may also cause family splits, [that are] not easily repaired. Any such individual "decision" has serious community effects and implications, in this world and in the realm of spiritual powers. Such a person may in fact be "scared to death" of the consequences.

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Associate Professor of anthropology, York University, Toronto. 1 August 2006. Correspondence.

Instructor at Camosun College, Victoria, British Columbia. 27 July 2006. Correspondence.

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: A lecturer from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, a professor at Camosun College in British Columbia, two professors at Indiana University, a professor at the University of Ghana, a professor from the University of Illinois, a professor from the University of Toronto, two professors from York University and two professors at the University of Pennsylvania did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

The African Studies Centre of the University of Cambridge and a professor at the University of Pennsylvania did not have information on the subject.

Attempts to contact the African Commission of Health and Human Rights Promoters were unsuccessful.

Publications: *Chieftaincy in Ghana*.

Internet sites, including: *Africa Confidential* [London], African Commission of Health and Human Rights Promoters, AllAfrica.com, Amnesty International, British Broadcasting Corporation, Factiva, Freedom House, GhanaNewsToday.com, *Ghana Review International*, *The Ghanaian Chronicle*, Human Rights Watch, Integrated Regional Information Networks, Jeuneafrique.com, National Commission on Culture, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United States Department of State, *West Africa Review*, World News Connection.

Copyright notice: This document is published with the permission of the copyright holder and producer Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB). The original version of this document may be found on the official website of the IRB at <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/>. Documents earlier than 2003 may be found only on Refworld.

Search Refworld

by keyword

and / or country

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Ghana](#)



© UNHCR 2020

[Partners](#)

[Help](#)

[Contact](#)

[Site Map](#)

[About](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Disclaimer](#)

[Privacy](#)