

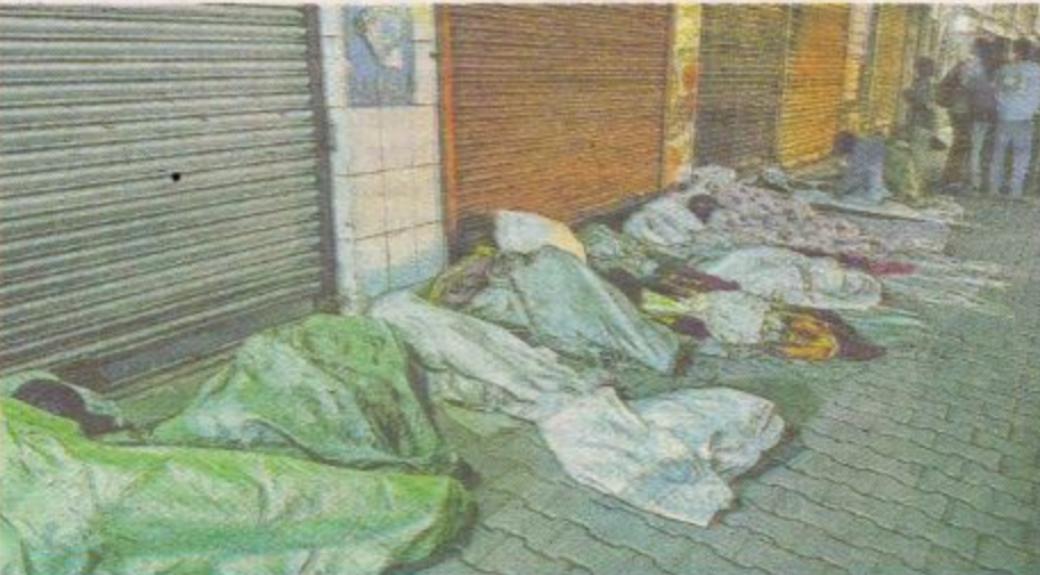
Christmas on streets: Kampala's children face hunger and harassment

BY VICENT LUSAMBYA

KAMPALA: For most Ugandans, Christmas is a season of family gatherings, warm meals, and festive celebrations. But for dozens of children living on the streets of Kampala, the holiday is a stark reminder of hunger, hardship, and uncertainty.

Huddled under a tattered blanket along Bombo Road, 10-year-old Dennis nurses a fractured leg, sustained while fleeing from patrolling police officers. "I ran, and a car ran over my leg. I was in pain, but we had nowhere to go," he says, illustrating the precarious existence of street children who are often seen as nuisances or criminals rather than children in need of protection.

Allan, a street children's team leader who has lived on the streets for six years, says harassment from authorities is a constant challenge. "Our colleague suffered a fractured leg, and it



Street kids sleep in front of buildings in Kampala last week. PHOTO/IBRAHIM KAVUMA

was difficult to get him treatment. Police often mistake us for criminals. My wish this Christmas is that we are treated with dignity, not arrested for simply

being on the streets," he says.

Many street children have fled homes that were meant to nurture them. Pius, who ran away after his father stopped

paying school fees, dreams of returning to school. "Life here is tough; people think we are thieves. My Christmas wish is that someone will help me go back to school. I want to study," he says.

For others, survival is tied to making small earnings. Queen Assenju, living on the streets for two weeks, hawks vegetables to get by. "I wish for capital to start a small business. That way, I can have a place to stay and earn for myself," she explains.

Fourteen-year-old Godfrey, who fled severe abuse at home, recounts how he spends Christmas at the mercy of kind-hearted organisations. Churches like the Universal Church host meals and give clothing, offering street children a brief respite from hardship. "It's only one day, but it brings hope," Godfrey says.

Some well-wishers, like Speke Resort Munyonyo, are extending this festive cheer to street children, providing spe-

cial lunches and fun activities. Yet, for many children, these gestures, while welcome, are temporary reprieves from the harsh realities of street life.

Amon, who collects empty bottles for a living, dreams of buying a computer and returning to Nebbi to become a DJ. Lorna has been on the streets for four months, hopes for decent clothing and transport to return home safely, fearing harassment from exposure.

Christmas for street children is not about gifts or parties, it is about survival, dignity, and a hope for a future beyond the streets. Their wishes are simple but profound: a chance at education, a safe place to sleep, and opportunities to earn and rebuild their lives.

As the city celebrates, these children's quiet dreams serve as a reminder that the spirit of Christmas extends beyond feasting and festivities, it is also about compassion, empathy, and giving a hand to those most in need.