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Muslims attack worship service in Uganda

Church member taking photos beaten, building damaged

By Simba Tian

Compass Direct (11.11.2009) / HRWF Int. (11.11.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - About 40 Muslim extremists with machetes and clubs tried to break into a Sunday worship service outside Uganda's capital city of Kampala on Nov. 1, leaving a member of the congregation with several injuries and damaging the church building.

Eyewitnesses said the extremist mob tried to storm into World Possessor's Church International in Namasuba at 11 a.m. as the church worshipped.

"The church members were taken by a big surprise, as this happened during worship time," said Pastor Henry Zaake. "It began with an unusual noise coming from outside, and soon I saw the bricks falling away one by one. Immediately I knew that it was an attack from the Muslims who had earlier sent signals of an imminent attack."

The pastor said the disturbance brought the worship service to a standstill.

"There was a tug-of-war at the entrance to the church as members tried to thwart the Muslim aggression from making headway inside the church," he told Compass.

A member of the congregation who was taking photos of the worship service – and then the attack – was beaten, sustaining several injuries, church leaders said. He was later taken to a nearby clinic for treatment. During the pandemonium, some church members were able to escape through a rear door.

Pastor Umar Mulinde added that nearby residents helped repel the attack.

"At the scene of the incident were rowdy Muslims with machetes and clubs ready to destroy the church," Pastor Mulinde said. "The good neighbors of the church also came in, and we were able to overpower [the assailants]."

Police arrived and put a stop to the assault, but officers did not arrest anyone, church leaders said.

"We have reported the matter to the central police station, and we are surprised that no action has been taken," Pastor Zaake said. "So far no person has been arrested as a result of this mayhem. It is as if the police are not concerned about our security and lives."

Many in the church are now living in fear, he said, noting that last Sunday (Nov. 8), attendance decreased from 250 to 100 people.

"Since the attack we have been receiving a lot of threats from the Muslims," Pastor Zaake said. "There is a conspiracy that we can't understand. This trend really gives me sleepless nights."

Area Muslims have long opposed the existence of the church in Namasuba, complaining that church members try to convert area Muslims. Christian sources said the initial pretext for damaging the church building was that its outdoor stairway encroached on the alley; the estimated US\$535 (1 million Uganda shillings) in damages were limited to the stairway. The sources said that when the complaint of the stairway encroaching on the alley fell on deaf ears, local Muslim and community leaders criticized the church for making too much noise.

Namasuba is predominantly Islamic, with some estimates of Muslim adherents going as high as 80 percent of the population.

Pastor Zaake said area Muslims have been holding meetings at night, which he suspects concern plans to paralyze Christian activities.

"It looks like they are planning for another attack, especially in light of the threatening messages I have been receiving on my mobile phone from anonymous senders," a worried Pastor Zaake told Compass by phone.

The church has been meeting in Namasuba since March. It is located four kilometers from Kampala on a quarter-acre parcel.

Although the Ugandan constitution guarantees religious freedom, authorities hardly prosecute Muslim attacks against Christians, church leaders said.

"The police silence on the whole issue is worrying and leaves a lot to be desired," Pastor Zaake said.

Threats, expulsions for Christian couple in Uganda

Hostilities evident in Muslim area where missionaries were slain

By Simba Tian

Compass Direct (26.06.2009) / HRWF Int. (29.06.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - When a young Muslim woman in northern Uganda heard about Jesus in February 2005 and began having dreams about the cross of Christ, it marked the beginning of a nightmare.

Between the dreams and otherwise sleepless nights, Aleti Samusa of Yumbe district soon converted to Christianity; her family immediately kicked her out of their home.

Economically devastated and deprived of that which is most valued in the communal culture, Samusa sought refuge in a local church in Lotongo village. There she found the man she would marry later that year, David Edema, who was raised a Christian but who began sharing in the sufferings of a convert from Islam by virtue of becoming one flesh with one.

His bride's family did not attend the couple's wedding, Edema told Compass, and it wasn't long before her relatives threatened to break up their marriage. With Samusa's family threatening to forcibly take her from Edema, the couple fled Lotongo village to Yumbe town. Their troubles had just begun.

"The Muslims started sending people, saying that I am not wanted in Yumbe town and that I should leave the town," Edema said.

Most houses in Yumbe are owned by Muslims, he said, and since 2006 the couple has been forced to move from one rented house to another without notice.

"The owner just wakes up one morning and gives us marching orders to vacate the house," the 29-year-old Edema said. "Nowadays, the situation is getting worse. Muslims are openly saying even in their mosques that they plan to take unknown action against my family."

One potential danger amounts to a death threat against his wife, now 24.

"The Muslims are saying that they are going to send some Jinns [evil spirits] to my wife because she forsook Islam, and that this spirit will kill her," he said.

Asked what steps he has taken in the face of these threats, Edema was resigned.

"It will be pointless to take this matter to court, because the people who are to hear the case are Muslims," he said. "I feel no justice will be done."

Area violence

Edema said he and his wife are hoping that God will open a door for them to move to another town.

"The sooner the better for us," he said, "for we do not know what the Muslims are planning to do with us."

Violence in Yumbe district is not without precedent. On March 18, 2004, seven suspected radical Islamists dressed in military fatigues murdered two African Inland Mission missionaries and a Ugandan student in an attack on a college run by local aid group Here is Life. Warren and Donna Pett, both 49 and agriculture experts from the U.S. state of Wisconsin, were teachers at the Evangelical School of Technology. The slain student was Isaac Juruga.

The murder case was dismissed in February by the state attorney, who claimed lack of evidence. A Here is Life official who requested anonymity, however, said not enough weight was given to evidence that included a mobile phone recovered from one of the suspected assailants.

"We feel that justice was not done in the ruling of the killing of the two missionaries," he said.

In Yumbe, the administrative arm of the government as well as the judiciary is run by Muslims, said Edema, who added that the district is still not a safe place for Christians.

"Sometimes they even confront me that I should stop converting Muslims to Christianity – this is not true," Edema said. "It is just a way of wanting to pick a quarrel with me."

Edema, his wife and two children belong to Pilgrim Church. Christians and converts to Christianity are a tiny minority in the area, but about three kilometers from Yumbe town

is the Church of Uganda in Eleke, with a congregation of about 100. This church has recently sounded alarms about Muslims making land-grabs of its property.

A church leader who requested anonymity said area Muslims have seized a substantial portion of the church's land, but when the matter went to court, the case was dismissed due to lack of a title deed.

In addition, in May Muslim youths beat a female church worker who had taken a photo of a mosque that was under construction 100 meters from the church, he said.

"Rowdy Muslim youths removed the film after destroying the lid of the camera," he said. "The militant youths started beating up the church worker as they dragged her to the police station in Yumbe, where she was interrogated for three hours before being released."

Peter Manasseh, vicar of the Eleke Church of Uganda, said the church has filed a complaint with the local governing council, "but we do not expect any fairness to be done because the person handling this case is a Muslim and will be partisan."

A journalist who works for a Christian radio station, however, decided to look into the case – and was himself beaten. Ronald Oguzu of Voice of Life radio in Arua town went to Yumbe yesterday to investigate, said a senior station official who requested anonymity.

"At the mosque site, the Muslims caught hold of Oguzu, beat him and he had his tooth broken," the official said. "He was then hospitalized in Yumbe hospital and is still receiving some medication."

He said a criminal case has been filed, but that chances for justice were not good.

"We know that this case will be thrown out of the window, just like that of the killing of the two missionaries," he said. "To date no arrests have been made."

Soldier held over Church demolition

By Abdulkarim Ssendendo

New Vision (07.06.2009) / HRWF Int. (08.06.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - THE Police in Mbarara are holding an army officer attached to Masindi barracks over demolishing the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Biharwe sub-county.

Mugume is among the four suspects arrested on June 6 at the church site in the morning as believers had come to worship.

The officer in-charge of Biharwe Police Post, Abel Baguma, identified others as Yonah Matovu, Shaban Matovu and Sylvestino Kyesiga.

They reportedly cut down over 106 trees belonging to church on Saturday morning, which they sold before they were arrested.

Baguma yesterday said the suspects have been taken to Mbarara Central Police Station, adding that they would be charged with criminal trespass.

The shocked worshippers were forced to hold prayers under trees.

A church member, Jane Mugarura, was beaten up seriously when she questioned the men about why they demolished the house of God.

Two years ago, Yonah Matovu demolished the main Church claiming that it was built on his father's land.

Pastor James Mugisha of the South-western SDAâMission said believers later constructed a temporary structure and were planning to construct a permanent building.

Matovu is the son of the late Daudi Zimwanguyiza, who donated the land to Biharwe Seventh Day Adventist Church before he died six years ago.

After Zimwanguyiza's death, Matovu claimed ownership of the land occupied by the church.

The church leaders, however, said they have documents to prove ownership.