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Catholic priest targeted in acid attack in Zanzibar

BBC News (13.09.2013) - A Roman Catholic priest in Zanzibar has received treatment in hospital after attackers threw acid at him on a street in the island's capital, police say.

Elderly priest Joseph Anselmo Mwangambwa was attacked as he was leaving an internet cafe in the island's old town.

It follows a similar attack on two young British women there last month.

Tensions between the majority Muslim population and Christians have been on the increase in recent years, as well as on mainland Tanzania.

"He sustained burns in his face and shoulders. The acid burnt through his shirt," Zanzibar police spokesman Mohamed Mhina told Reuters.

Tanzanian police say they are searching for witnesses to the attack which occurred in the old part of Zanzibar City, Stone Town, on Friday afternoon.

Tourism is a key source of revenue, with some 200,000 visitors to Zanzibar last year

It is the latest in a series of assaults on religious figures in the country and the fifth acid attack since November, when a Muslim cleric was hospitalised with acid burns.

In a sign of further tension, a Catholic priest was shot dead in February.

The attack on the British girls in August occurred in the same part of Stone Town.

Zanzibar's President Ali Mohammed Shein said the assault had "brought chaos and confusion to our country and outside".

Zanzibari officials offered a £4,000 (\$6,000) reward for information leading to the arrest of the suspects.

A popular tourist destination, the acid attacks came as a shock to many residents of Zanzibar who say attacks on foreign travellers are rare.

Police say no suspects have been arrested over the attack on the priest.

"The Church is object of persecution but the government does not intervene"

Vatican Today - The recent attack carried out during the inauguration of the parish of St. Joseph the Worker in Arusha is only the latest in a series of acts of persecution against Christians in Tanzania. This was denounced by His Exc. Mgr. Tarcisius Ngalalekumwta, Bishop of Iringa and President of the Episcopal Conference of Tanzania, during the homily at the funeral of the three victims of the attack. In his speech he stresses how such barbaric acts are considered wild, shameful and unworthy of our Country. In addition, there have been intimidation against the Church and its leaders through publications, brochures, magazines, DVD, CD, radio.

Threats which were followed by the burning of churches, attacks and assassinations against leaders of the Church." In February Fr. Evarist Mushi was killed in Zanzibar, while at Christmas another Catholic priest, Ambrose Mkenda had been seriously wounded in an ambush. In addition, some Christian churches were looted. Mgr. Ngalalekumwta denounces in particular the violent propaganda by some extremist Muslim leaders against the Church, recalling for example the meeting held on January 15, 2011 by a group of Islam believers at the Diamond Jubilee Hall in Dar es Salaam, during which it was stated that Tanzania is "governed in a Christian way."

This group also asked for the closure of the local Nunciature. "Their goal, according to their statements and their publications, is to eradicate Christianity," says Mgr. Ngalalekumwta. "What is really sad for us, is that our government has never condemned the claims and accusations of those people, nor arrested them" said the President of the Episcopal Conference. Mgr. Ngalalekumwta after pointing out that extremists do not represent the majority of Tanzanian Muslims, concludes by pointing out that the process of nation-building is based on feelings of "peace, love, unity and solidarity that we have inherited from the founding fathers of the nation".

Bomb outside new Catholic church one of worst 'terrorist' incidents in years

World Watch Monitor (10.05.2013) - Tanzania, once celebrated as a role model for peace in Africa, is no longer being considered 'safe' after an increase in inter-faith violence, with little evidence so far of perpetrators brought to justice.

Last Sunday's blast outside St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Arusha, a town popular with tourists visiting the Serengeti national park and Mount Kilimanjaro, was just the latest example.

The newly built church, in the Olasti district on the outskirts of Arusha, was celebrating its first ever mass at the time of the attack, which left three dead and more than 60 injured.

Escalating violence

Tension has been building between the two most populous religious communities in Tanzania – Christians comprise 62 per cent of the population, while 35 per cent is Muslim (Pew, 2010).

In Zanzibar, which is 97 per cent Muslim, arsonists burned the Evangelical Church of Siloam on February 19, two days after gunmen killed a Catholic priest, Father Evaristus Mushi, in the Motni area of the island.

Earlier that month, an Assemblies of God minister, Pastor Mathayo Kachili, was hacked to death in the Geita region of Lake Victoria, when he intervened in an altercation between villagers over the slaughter of an animal, after the local government had granted Christians the right to practice as butchers.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide reports that church leaders began to receive text messages from a group calling itself 'Muslim Renewal' which claimed responsibility for these murders, adding the killers were 'trained in Somalia' and which promised 'disaster' during the Easter season.

The BBC reported in April that police used teargas to disperse about 200 Christian rioters attempting to set fire to a mosque. Earlier in March, 52 followers of controversial Muslim cleric Sheikh Issa Ponda, head of Jumuiya yaw a Islamu (an Islamic group not recognised by the Tanzanian government), were jailed for a year for their part in October 2012 riots in Dar es Salaam, sparked by rumours that a 12-year-old boy at a Christian school had urinated on a copy of the Qur'an.

Sheikh Ponda and some followers were released yesterday and cleared of conspiracy, abduction, theft and incitement to violence. However, Sheikh Ponda was found guilty of forceful entry into a property and handed a suspended 12-month prison sentence.

Bombing in Arusha

Home Affairs minister, Dr Emmanuel Nchimbi, said that police were questioning two Tanzanians and four foreigners. The United Arab Emirates Foreign Ministry on Wednesday 8th confirmed three of its citizens were held in Tanzania. The Saudi Ambassador to Tanzania is reported to have said one Saudi is also detained.

The minister named 20-year-old motorcyclist Victor Ambrose as one of those being held in connection with the attack.

Dr Nchimbi said Mr Ambrose is suspected of throwing a bomb into the crowd when the Vatican envoy to Tanzania, Archbishop Francisco Padilla, and Archbishop Josaphat Lebulu were leading mass during the consecration of the new church building.

Regina Longino Kurusei, 45, was killed on the spot and James Gabriel, 16, died on the way to Muhimbili National Hospital. Further investigations are being conducted to establish the type of bomb used, said the minister.

"The government has been disappointed with politicians who use such incidents that claim people's lives for political gain. It is inhuman and the government will not tolerate it."

--Dr Emmanuel Nchimbi, Home Affairs Minister

The road to justice

Minister Nchimbi said a taskforce has been formed to ensure all culprits are arrested and brought to trial. The full range of defence and security agencies, including the Tanzania People's Defence Forces (TPDF), have been engaged in the investigation, he said.

"The government has formed the taskforce to investigate the matter and I am confident that those who are behind this incident will be arrested and taken to court," said Dr Nchimbi. "We are doing everything in our capacity to address the situation."

In Parliament, meanwhile, legislators from both the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) and the main opposition, Chadema, traded accusations on which party was to blame for allowing the rising attacks on places of worship and clerics.

Mr Tundu Lissu (Chadema) accused the government of fuelling religious tensions. The ruling CCM legislators, in turn, pointed an accusing finger at Chadema, arguing that remarks by the party's leaders that the country would be ungovernable had come to pass.

Dr Nchimbi had earlier warned against politicising the Sunday attack. "The government has been disappointed with politicians who use such incidents that claim people's lives for political gain," he said. "It is inhuman and the government will not tolerate it."

Sheikh Issa Bin Shaaban Simba, head of the Tanzania Muslim Council (Bakwata), said: "We condemn the attack and we urge security organs to work hard to find the culprits. This is a sad situation for all Tanzanians."

Words from the President

President Jakaya Kikwete said the bomb attack, for which no group has yet claimed responsibility, was "an act of terrorism" and one of the worst such incidents to hit the east African country in years.

The president also urged Christians to continue attending church services every Sunday. "If we don't do so, we will have given victory to those who carried out the attack," he said.

President Kikwete also ensured the government "will provide security around all places of worship".

Officials have given no indication as to which group they think might be behind the attack, but Kikwete, who said he was "shocked and deeply saddened" by the incident, called on people to remain calm while police investigated.

Church in Tanzania bombed during inaugural service; five killed

Barnabas Fund (08.05.2013) - At least five people were killed and around 60 wounded in the bombing of a new church building in [Tanzania](#) during a service to mark its official opening.

An explosive device was thrown into the church compound in Olasti, a predominantly Christian suburb of Arusha, on Sunday (5 May). The attack was condemned by Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete as an "act of terrorism".

Among those killed were James Gabriel (16) and Regina Longino Kurusei (45). Many of the wounded were in a critical condition.

Senior Church figures were in attendance for the inaugural service. A Barnabas Fund contact in [Tanzania](#) said:

This was... a well-planned attack. Even before it the threat was given and still we have many threats. Pray for us and that God will overcome all these in Jesus' name.

He said that radical camps in the country were teaching young Muslims that Christians must be killed or live as second-class citizens. He said that senior Christian leaders had reported details of these camps to the authorities, but no serious action had been taken against them.

Christian leaders and converts from Islam are particularly vulnerable to attack.

Eight suspects have been arrested, four Saudi Arabians and four Tanzanians; one of them, Victor Calisti Ambrose, is alleged to have thrown the bomb.

Police had previously warned of the potential threat of violence by al-Qaeda and [Somalia](#)-based al-Shabaab, which has been behind a number of anti-Christian incidents in neighbouring [Kenya](#).

The bombing follows a number of attacks on Christian leaders and churches in [Tanzania](#). Two church leaders were [killed](#) in separate incidents in February; another had been [shot](#) in the face and shoulder on Christmas Day.

Several church [buildings](#) were [torched](#) and vandalised in October 2012 after a Christian boy was accused of desecrating a Quran.

Islamic separatist group UAMSHO (Association for Islamic Mobilisation and Propagation), which wants Zanzibar to become independent from mainland [Tanzania](#), was behind this and other [church attacks](#)

Opposition MPs on Sunday accused the government of being the main cause of religious tension in the country. Tundu Lissu said that the government was implicitly supporting the perpetrators by keeping silent on the bombing and torching of churches and killing of religious leaders.

Church attack case continues

The Guardian (23.02.2013) - The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) Mbagala Diocese pastor Frank Kimango told the Kisutu Resident Magistrate Court in Dar es Salaam that, he was forced to jump over a wall to escape the stone throwers and machete wielders after the church was attacked by an angry mob late last year.

Kimango made the claim before Resident Magistrate Walialwande Lema on Monday when he testified in the five-count case including the damage, armed robbery and theft all the property worth 520m/- property of ELCT against the rowdy mob that was protesting the defilement of the Islamic holy book.

The accused in the case are Hamad Senkondo, Shego Shego, Mashaka Imani, Hamza Mohamed, Mikidadi Sadiki, Juma Mbegu, Issa Abdallah, Hamis Kimwaga, Ramadhani Mburuand Mohamed Yusuph.

Under the guardianship of Principal State Attorney Tumaini Kweka, the reverend claimed that when the group attacked the church, the watchman fired a warning shot but the gun failed to make a second shot and the group that had scattered returned with vengeance.

"When they returned they found a watchman struggling with the gun..." explained the clergy, adding, "... they began throwing stones at him and so he ran backward and I did the same..."

He admitted that he could not recognise any person involved in the attack because he was in shock and traumatised with the escape.

"I returned later and found the main entrance gate broken..." said the priest "...the altar was burnt... the wall broken and the boxes used to keep offerings (alms) were burnt along with other things..."

The case was adjourned to February 4, this year when it will be brought up for hearing.
