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There's still time to check rising attacks on Tanzania's Christians

WEA (14.03.2014) - Several incidents of bombing of churches and killing of Christians have been reported in Tanzania in the recent past. While the attackers are non-state actors, the government shares the blame for failing to deal with growing religious tensions in the East African nation.

Attacks have increased in Zanzibar, which is a semi-autonomous archipelago where around 98 percent of the population is Muslim, as well as on the mainland, where Christians are supposedly more than the Muslim population.

On Feb. 24, a bomb exploded at the entrance of the Christ Church Cathedral, an Anglican church building, in Stone Town in Zanzibar, according to Morning Star News. On Feb. 23, a bomb exploded near the door of the Evangelistic Assemblies of God Zanzibar church building in Kijito Upele-Fuoni, outside Zanzibar City, just as the worship service was about to end.

A week earlier, on Feb. 15, a home-made bomb was thrown at the door of a Seventh-day Adventist church during the worship service in the Tomondo area, just a few miles from Stone Town. A day later, another such bomb was thrown at the church's doorway.

Last year, the Rev. Evaristus Mushi, a Roman Catholic priest, was shot dead in the Mtoni area outside Zanzibar City. And acid was thrown on the face and chest of a Catholic priest, the Rev. Joseph Anselmo Mwangamba, on the outskirts of Zanzibar City.

In 2012, the Rev. Ambrose Mkenda, a Catholic priest, was shot in the cheeks and the shoulder in Tomondo in the archipelago.

Such attacks have also grown on the mainland.

Last December, a Lutheran church in Korogwe town in Korogwe District and an Evangelical Assemblies of God church in Kalalani village in the same district were burnt down.

In May, a bomb exploded at the Saint Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Olasti, a predominantly Christian suburb of the northern city of Arusha, killing three people and injuring more than 60 others.

In March, unidentified people attacked the residence of Archbishop Valentino Mokiwa, the Bishop of Dar es Salaam and Primate of the Anglican Church of Tanzania.

In February, 45-year-old Pastor Mathayo Kachila was beheaded in the Geita Region's Buseresere town following calls by Muslim leaders to close down all Christian-owned butcheries.

In Zanzibar, attacks on Christians have been rising since the formation of the Zanzibar Government of National Unity in 2010, after the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party and the rival Civic United Front (CUF) party resolved differences. Following this, the Islamic political group UAMSHO (Association of Islamic Awareness and Public Discourse) began calling for the separation of Zanzibar from mainland Tanzania.

Most of the attacks on Christians there have been attributed to the UAMASHO.

On the mainland, supporters of a controversial cleric, Sheikh Ponda Issa Ponda, who leads the group called Simba wa Mungu (God's Lion), are believed to be behind many attacks on churches. Ponda is also highly influential in Zanzibar.

Other Islamic movements – such as the Ansar al-Sunnah, which seeks a purified Islam in Tanzania, and the Tablighi Jama'at, which seeks to improve the morality of Muslim society by improving the behavior of Muslims – also exist on mainland Tanzania.

Some Islamic figures preach that Muslim traditions are under threat in a secular state, and therefore there's a need to return to the basics to protect the Islamic way of life.

The Saudis are allegedly spending about \$1 million annually in Tanzania to build new mosques and also to woo the ruling CCM party, according to a Western intelligence report.

There is also a sense of marginalization among sections of the Muslim community. Some Islamic leaders believe that although Muslims were in the forefront of the country's struggle against German and British rulers in the past, the community has not been given its due place in the country. They often use the Swahili word, "Mfumo Kristo," which roughly translates as "Christian dominance," to describe the country's politics.

Some Muslims also claim that they outnumber Christians even on the mainland. There are no official figures on the demographical composition of the country. However, according to a 2010 Pew Forum survey, roughly 60 percent of the population is Christian, 36 percent Muslim, and 4 percent are from other religious groups.

Thus far, Tanzania's Islamist forces have generally remained confined to addressing issues in their local contexts. However, visible attempts are being made by Islamist militant and terror groups operating from elsewhere in East Africa and beyond to target Muslims in Tanzania for recruitment and mobilization.

In 1998, suicide bombers linked to al-Qaeda killed 11 people in an attack on the U.S. embassy in Dar es Salaam with the involvement of some people from Zanzibar. This was an early warning sign for Tanzania.

The bombing came six years after the abolition of the single-party state through a 1992 law guaranteeing freedom of political organizations, which allowed for formation of diverse kinds of associations. Groups that were formerly banned emerged and began to call for a more purified Islam.

Most recently, police arrested more than a dozen youngsters in the southern Mtwara area (last September) for doing armed drills, using videos of alleged training manuals by al Qaeda and al Shabaab.

Tanzania is attractive for international terror groups. It has a significant number of Muslims and it lies close to nations like Somalia, Kenya and Uganda. Black marketing of

arms and weapons is rampant around the borders of Tanzania, which also has a wide-open coastline.

The president of Tanzania, Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, who is a Muslim, cannot evade responsibility for the growing sectarian tensions on the mainland or in Zanzibar.

The constitution of Tanzania and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. The Zanzibar constitution also contains religious freedom provisions. And while the archipelago has its own president and constitution, it is subject to the Tanzanian constitution.

The successive governments of the country have already ignored early signs of religious intolerance, and the result is evident. Continuing to do so can be catastrophic for not only Christians but also for the nation as a whole.

Tanzania: two churches and a restaurant bombed in Zanzibar

CSW (25.02.2014) - Bomb attacks on the island of Zanzibar targeted Christ Church Anglican Cathedral and a well-known restaurant on 24 February, and an Evangelistic Assemblies of God Tanzania (EAGT) church on 25 February.

Two bombs were detonated at the main entrance of Christ Church Anglican Cathedral and the Former Slave Market in the centre of Stone Town at around 1pm on 24 February. Another bomb exploded at Mercury's, a restaurant named after (Freddie Mercury) the late lead singer of the rock group Queen who was born in Zanzibar. According to eyewitnesses, the bomb at the Cathedral consisted of dynamite and was detonated remotely.

On 23 February, a homemade bomb reportedly containing a mixture of ball bearings and chemicals was detonated at an EAGT Church. The bomb exploded as the church service was coming to a close, shaking the building and causing alarm amongst the congregation. It is unclear whether anyone was injured or to what extent the church building was damaged.

The bomb attacks come as Tanzania's political parties prepare for elections in which a key issue will be the legal relationship between the mainland and the semi-autonomous Zanzibar archipelago. A Zanzibari separatist group Uamsho (Awakening) is calling for an end to the union and for Zanzibar to become an independent nation.

Uamsho is alleged to be behind an upsurge in religious violence in Zanzibar. Since December 2012, when a Catholic priest was wounded by unknown gunmen, there have been several major attacks on church leaders on the Island. In February 2013, the murder of a Protestant pastor was followed a week later by the killing of a Catholic priest. In September 2013, a retired Catholic priest was seriously injured in an acid attack.

In January 2014, a mob invaded the Sunday service of a Pentecostal Evangelism Fellowship of Africa (PEFA) in Kisauni with the intention of killing the senior pastor, and beat up a visiting clergyman after failing to find him. Local Christians report receiving threats via text message or in leaflets naming church leaders who have been targeted for assassination, and in some instances referring to a prospective date. In addition, at least 20 churches have been looted and either burnt or demolished by mobs. Although police are investigating recent attacks, perpetrators of previous incidents of religious violence

have yet to be brought to justice even when identified or caught in the act, and investigations are generally extended indefinitely.

CSW Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are thankful no lives were lost in these bomb attacks. However, the use of a remote device during Monday's bombing indicates that perpetrators of religious violence are attaining new levels of sophistication and planning, while the use of ball bearings in the earlier attack highlights their desire to inflict maximum injury. The Government of Tanzania must undertake swift investigations in order to ensure that those responsible for these attacks are brought to justice. It is also vital for the Tanzanian Government to uphold freedom of religion or belief for all its citizens, including the Christian minority in Zanzibar, in line with its international obligations under article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."
