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## **Doctors try to save remaining eye of Ugandan pastor**

***Another pastor, close friend of victim of acid attack, is also ambushed***

By Simba Tian

Compass Direct News (28.02.12) – While a Ugandan pastor was fighting to retain sight in his remaining eye after an acid attack, Muslim extremists this month were shooting at his close friend, a leader of another church.

Doctors at Sheba Hospital in Tel-Aviv, Israel, are still not sure what kind of chemicals Muslim extremists cast on Bishop Umar Mulinde of Gospel Life Church International outside of Kampala last Christmas Eve, but they know that the acid is threatening the vision in his remaining eye.

“I am regaining my sight, though the healing progress is a bit slow,” Mulinde told Compass by phone. “Doctors are still looking for ways to save it, but it seems a complicated case. The chemical was very strong, and each day it was going deeper, with pain increasing day by day; even the doctors are interested to know which type of acid it was, because it really did great damage to me.”

Mulinde, a former sheikh (Islamic teacher) who became the target of Islamic extremists after converting to Christianity in 1993, said his left eye has been getting better under the specialized treatment he has been able to receive since Compass publicized the attack on him.

“The damaged right eye is somehow affecting the left eye,” Mulinde said. “The doctors are thinking of removing the right eye with hope of saving the left eye.”

Muslim extremists are opposed not only to his conversion from Islam but his outspoken opposition to *sharia* (Islamic law) courts in Uganda, he said. On Oct. 15, 2011, area Muslim leaders declared a *fatwa* against him demanding his death. He is known for debates locally and internationally in which he often challenges Muslims regarding their religion.

Mulinde said he was encouraged that ministry is continuing at his church in Namasuba, about 10 kilometers (six miles) outside of Kampala, though his friend Zachariah Serwadda, a pastor with an Evangel Church congregation, was ambushed on Feb. 4 after an evangelistic outreach in the predominantly Muslim town of Mbale.

Serwadda, who has been attacked by Islamic extremists before, told Compass he was not sure how many began firing guns at his car at 10:30 p.m.

“I only heard several voices as I dropped down when the windshield of my vehicle got broken,” said Serwadda, who was unhurt in the attack. “It could be the same group [that attacked Mulinde]. It seems it’s the same network, because after attacking Bishop

Mulinde they threw down letters at the Gospel Life Church International there threatening to attack other preachers like him.”

The attack took place on Tirinyi Road, between Mbale and Kamonkole, he said. Three other Christians were with him at the time. Since the Feb. 4 attack, the only security precaution he has taken was to report the incident at Iganga police station, he said.

Serwadda said there seems to be a new wave of persecution against Christians in Uganda. Besides Mulinde, also attacked last year were church leaders Hassan Muwanguzi and Hassan Sharif Lubenga, he said, and there were two other serious incidents, one in 2010 and one in 2009.

“In 2010 pastor Jamada Kikomeko of Nateete Victory Church was attacked during a gospel outreach in Entebbe town – bullets were shot with intent to assassinate him while he was returning from the outreach that night,” he said. “He managed to escape, took his coat and ran on foot for safety.”

The assailants vandalized his car, smashing all the windshields, he added.

In 2009, evangelist Yazid Muwanguzi was assaulted in Nakaloke, in Mbale district, barely escaping with his life after Muslims attacked chanting “*Allahu Akbar* [Arabic for “God is greater”], Serwadda said.

“But some Christians were severely injured,” he said.

Serwadda also survived a barrage of gunfire in 1997. A Muslim extremist tried to stop him as he was coming home from an evangelistic outreach in Jinja, but Serwadda saw an armed group standing on both sides of the road, he said; refusing to stop, he drove through as 20 bullets struck his vehicle.

He called his survival “miraculous.”

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## **Former Muslim extremist in Uganda flees wrath of ex-colleagues**

***Convert to Christianity faces death threats; father committed suicide over conversion***

By Simba Tian

Compass Direct (27.01.12) – A former member of a Muslim extremist group in Uganda who converted to Christianity is in hiding in Kenya, his movements severely restricted following threats to kill him.

Hassan Sharif Lubenga, 54, was a sheikh and member of the Buk Haram, a violent group of Islamists whose name suggests the Bible is corrupt and therefore forbidden. Originally from Chengera, seven kilometers from Kampala, the husband to four wives began his conversion process four years ago; in June 2011, he said, after various dreams and visions in which Jesus appeared to him, he made a full commitment to follow Christ.

Lubenga fled to Kenya last July 10 after hostilities peaked, and upon returning to Uganda in September he received messages on his cell phone from *mujahidin* – Islamic fighters – threatening to kill him, he said. He reported the threats to Chengera police, who told him

they would investigate, but in October a friend told him that he'd heard in a Chengera mosque that his former colleagues were enraged and planning to kill him.

"My heart got troubled, but the voice of Jesus continued whispering to me to witness for Jesus without fear," Lubenga said.

When Lubenga felt like giving up on his new faith, he said, he received a call from Bishop Umar Mulinde, his former pastor at Gospel Life Church International who was scarred in a Christmas Eve acid attack by Muslim extremists. Mulinde told him the church was praying for him, and Lubenga was deeply heartened, he said.

"All my family members have deserted me," he said by telephone. "The Muslims are looking to kill me. I need protection and help."

The Islamic extremists who had declared war on "infidels" such as Lubenga had been threatening him since 2007, when he first began to speak of dreams and visions of Christ. Dangers peaked in 2010, when Muslims saw him visiting a church in Uganda. By April 2010, one of his four wives had poisoned him because of his budding faith in Christ, leaving him unconscious, he said. After his recovery, he fled Chengera to a village 25 kilometers from Kampala, Kiwangala.

In 2007, he said, he told his Muslim jihadist friends that he had seen Jesus in a dream. He said they had warned him, "Do not make such a mistake again – we are ready to help you. If you continue with this move, then we will destroy you. You know that you are a sheikh."

He reported the threats to police at Insanje sub-county, Wakizo district, angering his colleagues, who sent threatening letters.

"I explained to them that it is Jesus who came to me, and not I who sought Him," he said. "They were furious. They then kidnapped me and blindfolded me for three days, coupled with beatings. They demanded I deny Jesus as the Son of God, which I consented to because I feared that they were going to kill me."

In 2009, another message from Jesus came to him in a vision, he said: "Do not hide your Christian faith."

Within a few months, another threatening letter arrived: "If you do not join Islamic Jihad, then we shall kill you."

Lubenga decided to go on pilgrimage to Mecca, in accordance with the tenets of Islam. While there, however, he heard another voice, he said: "You have decided to forsake me, and instead you are here to accuse me."

"I then saw Jesus high up with white robe," he said. "He laughed. I just left the place but got sick for two weeks. I visited Mohammed Ali, the head of *majini* [evil spirits], who promised that the *majini* will come and help me. But I did not receive any healing."

Jesus continued appearing to him for three months in visions, he said.

"I could not resist, so I decided to believe in Him and started openly declaring that Jesus is my personal Savior," Lubenga said. "The whole family and clan members were out to destroy me. I was poisoned by my own family."

His father, Morshid Kabide, came to his house in July 2010 to establish the truth of the rumors he had heard, Lubenga said.

"I heard that nowadays you do go to church, and you are claiming that you saw Jesus," his father told him. When he answered in the affirmative, reaffirming his decision to follow Jesus, his father was crestfallen; he later committed suicide, leaving a letter that read, "I have decided to kill myself because my son became a Christian" and urged all family members to curse him.

Lubenga said that since then he has been in hiding, growing more terrified as threats intensified.

"But I kept my faith in Jesus," he said. "I sold some of my belongings to build the church structure at Chengera, outside Kampala."

As a result of this act, threats on his life grew more shrill, and he fled to Kenya.

Two of his wives had left him in 2007; one has decided to stay with him, and he has been sharing his faith with her. The fourth wife, whom he married five years ago, is a Christian who has also received death threats; six months pregnant, she has fled to an undisclosed location.

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## **Convert from Islam in Uganda survives societal hostilities**

***Ostracized by family and fired from his job, Christian overcomes false charge***

By Simba Tian

Compass Direct (23.01.2012) – Hassan Muwanguzi, a convert from Islam in Uganda who lost his family and job because of his Christian faith, is thankful after fighting off the latest attack – an attempt by Muslims to imprison him and shut down the school he started.

Following his conversion in his early 20s in 2003, Muwanguzi's family immediately kicked him out of their home, and enraged Muslims beat him, he said. His wife left him that same year, and he lost his job as a teacher at Nankodo Islamic School, near Pallisa.

Undaunted, a year ago he opened a Christian school, Grace International Nursery and Primary School, at Kajoko, Kibuku district, 27 kilometers (17 miles) from Mbale town; the area's population of 5,000 people is predominantly Muslim.

Incensed by his boldness, an Islamic teacher, Sheikh Hassan Abdalla, filed a false charge that Muwanguzi had "defiled" his daughter, a minor. Together with his Muslim countrymen, Abdalla filed a case at the chief magistrate's court in Palissa-Kalaki, and a warrant for Muwanguzi's arrest was issued on April 1, 2011.

Initially he was locked up for three weeks, he said.

"After 48 hours, I was taken to court, and the judge read the charges against me and asked whether I knew of the case," Muwanguzi said. "I answered that I was not aware of such charges. I asked for a court bail, but the judge insisted that a bail can only be given after hearing from the complainant."

He was then sent to Kamuge Prison. On April 22, he appeared again before the judge, but the complainant did not appear. His lawyer appealed for his release.

He was freed on bail for 600,000 Uganda shillings (US\$246), he said. At his first hearing on May 21, the complainant did not appear. Nor did Sheikh Abdalla appear at hearings on June 25, July 16 and Aug. 13, Muwanguzi said.

"The judge found out it was a false accusation, hence the case was dropped," Muwanguzi said. "I had been subjected to humiliation, but I forgave them for the sake of my Christian outreach in the area."

He said the Muslims filed the charges because he had opened the Christian school against the wishes of the Muslim majority. More than a quarter of the school's 235 children come from Muslim homes, with the consent of their Muslim parents, he said.

"The Muslims have tried to use all kinds of threats to make me close the school – first they used witchcraft," he said. "This did not work, so then they tried to discourage Muslims from bringing their children to the school, saying that the school was converting Muslim children to Christianity by teaching Christian Religious Education."

The constitution and other laws protect religious freedom in Uganda, including the right to propagate one's faith and convert from one faith to another.

Muwanguzi has also helped the area to improve its agricultural practices, training the community to become self-reliant by starting tomato and eggplant gardens, among others, and providing free seeds to widows and other indigent people, including more than 100 Muslims.

"There is need for more seeds and insecticides so that the farmers can have good yields," he said. "This will help them see that Christianity has something good to offer to better their lives."

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