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Al Shabaab 'carefully planned' Kenya university massacre

Al Shabaab militants who killed 147 people during an attack on a university in northeastern Kenya appear to have carefully planned the massacre, specifically targeting a site where Christians prayed, a survivor said on Friday.

France24 (03.04.2015) - <http://www.france24.com/en/20150403-kenya-al-shabaab-attack-university-planned-survivor-says/> - Strapped with explosives, masked [al Shabaab](#) gunmen stormed the Garissa University College campus, some 200 km (120 miles) from the Somali border, in a pre-dawn rampage on Thursday.

One of the first areas they targeted was a lecture hall where a group of Christians had gone to pray that morning, according to survivor Helen Titus.

"They investigated our area. They knew everything," Titus told The Associated Press at a hospital in Garissa, where she was being treated for a bullet wound to the wrist.

Other survivors described harrowing scenes in which the attackers tossed grenades and sprayed bullets at cowering students during the siege, which lasted about 15 hours.

The massacre has left many local residents outraged at the government, which they say failed to prevent the bloodshed despite warnings over the last week that an attack on a university was imminent. They accuse the authorities of not doing enough to boost security in the little-developed region.

"It's because of laxity by the government that these things are happening. For something like this to happen when there are those rumours is unacceptable," said Mohamed Salat, 47, a Somali Kenyan businessman.

Fears that death toll will rise

Officials said that [147 people were killed](#) in the attack and at least 79 others were wounded, many critically. But with an uncertain number of students and staff still missing, a government source and media warned on Friday that the death toll was likely to climb.

"Yes, there is a likelihood of numbers going up," said one government source dealing with the Garissa attack.

[Kenya's](#) top-selling newspaper Daily Nation, citing sources, said the death toll would be significantly higher.

Outside the university gates, a throng of veiled women clung to the hope that missing people would still turn up alive.

"We are here waiting for news if we can find him, dead or alive," said Barey Bare, 36, referring to her cousin who worked as a clerk at the university and has been missing since Thursday.

The violence will heap further pressure on President [Uhuru Kenyatta](#), who has struggled to stop frequent militant gun and grenade attacks that have dented Kenya's image abroad and brought the country's vital tourism industry to its knees.

More than 400 people have been killed by al Qaeda-allied al Shabaab in the east African nation since Kenyatta took office in April 2013, including some 67 people who died in a blitz on the [Westgate shopping mall](#) in the capital Nairobi in September of that year.

Al Qaeda itself killed some 207 people when it blew up the US embassy in Nairobi in 1998, an attack which remains the single biggest loss of life in Kenya since its independence from Britain in 1963.

Al Shabaab says its recent wave of attacks are retribution for Kenya sending troops into Somalia to fight the group alongside other African Union peacekeepers.

The group, which at one point controlled most of Somalia, has lost swathes of territory in recent years but diplomats have repeatedly warned this has not diminished al Shabaab's ability to stage guerrilla-style attacks at home and further abroad.

'Most wanted' bounty

Survivors of the Garissa attack spoke of merciless executions by the attackers, who stalked classrooms and dormitories hunting for non-Muslim students.

Reuben Mwavita, 21, a student, said he saw three female students kneeling in front of the gunmen, begging for mercy.

"The mistake they made was to say, 'Jesus, please save us', because that is when they were immediately shot," Mwavita said.

Many students fled into the sandy scrubland, scaling barbed-wire fences and jumping off buildings, often half-naked, as they were awakened by the sound of gunfire and explosions.

"The attackers were just in the next room. I heard them ask people whether they were Christian or Muslim, then I heard gunshots and screams," said Susan Kitoko, 24, who broke her hip when she jumped out of the first floor window of her dorm.

"I don't know what happened to my two other roommates because I have not heard from them since then."

Within hours of the attack, Kenya put up a 20-million shilling (\$215,000) reward for the arrest of Mohamed Mohamud, a former Garissa teacher labelled "Most Wanted" in a government poster and linked by Kenyan media to two separate al Shabaab attacks in the neighbouring Mandera region last year.

The government also imposed a dusk-to-dawn (6:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m.) curfew on Garissa, Mandera and two other crime-ridden regions near the porous 700-km border with Somalia.

However, diplomats and analysts say the move effectively concedes that the government is not in control of these areas, which are widely seen to be Kenya's soft underbelly.

As such, al Shabaab is likely to continue its strategy of attacking "low risk and high reward" soft targets in marginalized parts of the country, according to Ahmed Salim, a senior associate at Teneo Intelligence.

One dead and church torched in village attack

CSW - A pastor's daughter died, several people were injured and a Baptist church was torched during an attack on a village in the Rogo Local Government Area (LGA) of Kano State on the evening of 1 April.

At a press conference in the Nigerian capital Abuja on 7 April, General Ishaku Ahmed Dikko (Rtd.), president of Tarayyar Masihiyawan Nijeriya (a Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri Christian organisation), said that the daughter of Reverend Habila Garba suffocated following an arson attack on her home in Gidan Maso Village. Local Muslim youth set fire to the house after failing to locate Yahaya Joshua, a Christian who had briefly converted to Islam before returning to Christianity.

General Dikko said the mob had wanted to kill Mr Joshua but when they could not find him they lit cornstalks inside the church and burned it to the ground, ignoring the pleas of the local Christians. They then went on to attack the pastor's residence nearby.

The mob also assaulted local Christians with machetes and two people sustained broken arms. "The Christians present exhibited great Christian qualities by not taking law into their hands by trying to stop them by force," said General Dikko.

The incident has been reported to the police and the District Head. Tarayyar Masihiyawan Nijeriya is also urging the authorities to take all necessary measures to end harassment of and attacks on the Christian community: "We have the right to belong to any religion of our choice and live anywhere in this country. We call on the authorities at all levels to rise up to their responsibilities of protecting lives and properties of every citizen in this country."

The attack in Rogo occurred barely a week after an arson attack on a branch of the Living Faith Church (also known as Winners Chapel) in Giwa LGA, Kaduna State, on 20 March by two unidentified men riding a motorcycle. The arson came a few months after the founder of Winners Chapel, David Oyedepo, reportedly endorsed outgoing President Goodluck Jonathan in the presidential election.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "CSW extends its deepest condolences to Rev Garba and his family. We also pray for the swift recovery of those injured in this attack. It is deeply alarming that a young woman has lost her life at the hands of people seeking to deprive someone of his internationally and constitutionally-guaranteed right to adopt a religion of his own choice. Given the fact that the Rogo attackers are from the same community and are known to the victims, we urge the local authorities to apprehend and prosecute the perpetrators and to ensure the protection of local non-Muslims, their homes and their houses of worship. As well as

combating Boko Haram, the Nigerian authorities must be proactive in ending the impunity surrounding religion-related violence in northern and central Shari'a states by other non-state actors, ensuring those responsible are swiftly brought to justice."

Kenya's bid to regulate religious institutions

LPI (20.02.2015) <http://life-peace.org/hab/kenyas-bid-to-regulate-religious-institutions-2/> - In November 2014, a television exposé revealed how a Salvation Ministries Church pastor, Victor Kanyari, performed tricks in Nairobi to lure his followers into donating seed money to his "church". The clip went viral, and the Kenyan government reacted by imposing an indefinite suspension of registration of new religious institutions (associations, societies, churches, mosques, temples etc) while calling for fresh registration of existing ones.[1] The existing religious bodies were also required to file details of their status and financial returns with the registrar of societies.

Attorney General Githu Muigai then announced that a framework was in the making to review the Societies Act and establish a special unit to manage religious institutions so that they operate like trade unions and political parties. According to him, operations of religious communities, churches, mosques and temples should be transparent and accountable and operate within the guidelines of spirituality that they purport to promote.[2]

What the new rules will mean

If adopted, the new set of regulations, known as the "*Religious Societies Compliance Rules*", will define standards for religious institutions as well as local and foreign clergy. For one to become a local clergy he/she will have to obtain a certificate of good conduct from the police and clearance from the Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission while foreign clergy will have to have work permits and a recommendation from their diplomatic missions. The government will also be supplied with details of religious institutions such as its leaders, committee members and registered trustees as well as their location. Similarly, religious institutions will need to file annual returns of their exemption or no-exemption to pay taxes. Otherwise, they will be declared dormant while a religious body that does not comply with the "Religious Societies Compliance Rules" within 60 days will have its license revoked.[3]

Religious institutions like churches, mosques and temples have in the past been registered as charities under the Societies Act. 'Societies', in this case, refers to: any club, company, partnership, or other association of ten or more persons, whatever its nature or object, established in Kenya, or having its headquarters or chief place of business in Kenya and any branch of a society.[4] For a society to be registered, it is required that information such as the full name of the organization, details of office bearers, copies of identity cards, passport photos, and a copy of the Kenya Revenue Authority pin number must be provided.

It is due to these minimal conditions, whereby anyone can register an institution and call it a religious entity, that some are suspicious about the efficacy of the new rules and are calling for stricter regulation in consultation with the clergy.[5] Some other stakeholders argue that instead of introducing new regulations that may or may not necessarily be in accordance with the law, the existing Societies Act should be enhanced for use in cases of breach of conduct by any registered religious entity and individuals.[6]

In reaction to the scandal exposed by a TV channel and as a reaction to the Attorney General's announcement, the National Council of Churches of Kenya, a national umbrella body of churches in the country, cautioned against 'generalization' and treatment of all churches as lawbreakers based on the action of a few individuals^[7] and instead recommended that criminals should be dealt with according to the existing law. The Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims shares the same sentiment. ^[8]

Through the Attorney General, the government has on numerous occasions stated that its intention is not to interfere with the work of religious institutions but to foster cooperation and promote accountability within religious entities. The government's dilemma, however, arises from tension between its secular nature and the constitutional provisions guaranteeing freedom of religion. On one hand, it realizes the danger of infringing upon the freedom of worship and association while on the other it is mandated to protect national values such as religious responsibility and coexistence (secularism), transparency and accountability regardless of the religious orientation of a society or association. Its stern action is therefore understandably more reactive, in response to pastor Kanyari's exposure and the emerging security threats of violent extremism, as opposed to an intention to curtail religious freedom.

Vices in places of worship

The new rules come in the context of cases of misuse of religion and places of worship, particularly churches and mosques. So, it is a matter of adherence to established cultures, norms and practices in these institutions vis-a-vis stipulations in national laws and religious teachings. The visible increase in aggressive evangelism in several religious traditions has led to commercialization of religion and exploitation of poor citizens in search of spiritual solace and solutions to their day-to-day problems by those operating under religious brand names such as "prophets" and "saints", hence attracting the attention of Kenyan authorities.

Another recent observation that brings the matter to light is the rise of the so-called cult rituals and sacrifice that hit climax with the death of a couple and their three children, alleged to have been members of a controversial Nigerian Church.^[9] These and many other similar incidents left the Kenyan audience wondering on the interconnection between money and the contemporary position of religious institutions.

Also worrisome is the misuse of mosques by radical groups in Nairobi^[10] and Mombasa, culminating in police raids^[11] specifically on Masjid Musa and Sakina mosques in Majengo that in general point to an existing complex problem of radicalization among Muslim communities.

Given the prevailing circumstances, it is expected that the government will not look the other way when unscrupulous clergymen use places of worship to advance their extremist agenda or defraud and abuse citizens. When a religious institution becomes a source of threat to a country's national security or to its citizens, the government is bound to take action. However, the question is: to what extent the government can exercise its powers while providing checks and balances in the activities of religious institutions without necessarily seeming to interfere with its affairs?

The burden lies in balancing its constitutional mandate vis-a-vis the rights to freedom of worship as guaranteed in the constitution and under the norm of separation of religion and state. Previously, only the government could scrutinize the clergy with the approval of the registrar of societies and the National Security Intelligence Services. Also, in the context of proposed amendments to the Public Benefits Organization Act (2013), which severely restricts the volume of foreign funding to local entities,^[12] what will be the procedure of administering foreign funding to mosques—mainly from the Gulf States—

and churches, mainly from western countries? How does the government intend to ascertain for what purpose these funds are utilized? Will the new regulations guarantee citizen security and safe religious spaces as the government goes about eradicating crimes and other vices from religious institutions?

Recommendations

In an era where the narrative of religious polarization prevails, regulation of religious institutions is necessary in order to curb other vices such as hate speech, to combat radicalization and promote religious tolerance. But, at the same time, for any such action to be successful, it will have to be conducted in a manner that will ensure a win-win situation with a clear-cut mandate of the government, on the one hand, and maintaining the independence of religious organizations on the other. With the proposal of the new rules, some religious institutions and their leaders have already come out to claim that they were not involved in the process of their formulation. This lack of buy-in from key stakeholders is the main flaw in this plan.

To prevent further suspicion of infringement on citizen's right to worship, the process of regulating religious institutions will have to involve all stakeholders, especially the clergy from Christian and Muslim traditions. This will succeed only if their implementation is based on coordination between the government, religious leaders^[13] and religious bodies such as the National Council of Churches of Kenya and the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims as well as other civil society activists. One-way implementation of this set of rules may create more problems than it seeks to address.

This is particularly significant because Kenya sees itself as a deeply spiritual society that has strong faith in its clergy and so any exercise without the blessings of the latter will most likely not succeed. The fact that even after his scandal has been made public, pastor Kanyari's church is still popular and is well attended, illustrates this point and the influence and power that religious narratives have in Kenya.^[14]

Equally important is to carefully consider the aspect of control of funding and taxation. For it to be effective, the proposed framework will also have to be all-inclusive and take consideration of basic details such as the rampant corruption across all sectors, including the government and religious institutions. The misuse of religion and religious institutions is not limited to some sections of the clergy; politicians are equally culpable as they mobilize voters and run campaigns by appropriating religious slogans. Therefore, for the new regulations to prevent misuse of religious institutions and places of worship, promote a culture of peaceful coexistence and ensure rule of law, the relationship between politicians and the clergy will also need to be closely examined.

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