

Introduction

A progressive rise in Tanzania's religious freedom violations and religion-related violence came into sharp focus in 2013, when the beheading of a pastor in the north-west of the country was followed by the bombing of Arusha's Catholic cathedral. Later in 2013, the discovery and arrest of alleged al Qaeda sympathisers as they underwent military training in a remote area on the Tanzanian mainland provided a further illustration of this escalation.

While reports of specific attacks by terrorist groups and their sympathisers have reduced on the mainland, there has been a steady deterioration in the general human rights climate since President John Magufuli took office in 2015.

Over Christmas 2017 clergy used their sermons to warn against the deteriorating human rights situation, and a spokesperson from the Ministry of Home Affairs threatened to de-register religious organisations that 'mix religion and politics'.

Religion-related violence

In October 2014 a Christian teacher was killed by unknown assailants while attending evening prayers at a Pentecostal Assemblies of God (TAG) church in the Kagera region. No one has been prosecuted in connection with the murder. In February 2015 the Roman Catholic Church in the Rulongo-Kanazi parish of Kagera was attacked, causing damage worth USD4,500. During 2015 a total of 19 churches were burned down in north-western Kagera, leaving 850 Christians without places of worship.

Religion-related attacks have also affected the Muslim community. On 19 May 2016 three people, including an imam, were killed in an attack on the Masjid Rahmani mosque in Mwanza. The attack was carried out by 15 individuals using improvised explosives, machetes and axes.

2017 saw a steady deterioration in the human rights climate, with restrictions on freedom of expression and on the press in particular. Several newspapers were shut down, including the Mawaio Newspaper, which was banned for printing an article linking controversial mining contracts with former presidents Benjamin Mkapa and Jakaya Kikwete, and over a dozen people were prosecuted for allegedly insulting the president via WhatsApp and other social media platforms. In February 2017 opposition politicians Godfrey Luena and Daniel John were killed, with police opening murder investigations in both cases. In September 2017 Member of Parliament and opposition Chief Whip Tundu Lissu was shot at his home in Dodoma, and transferred to a hospital in Kenya, then on to Brussels for treatment.

Zanzibar

Numerous attacks on Zanzibar's Christian community, including the destruction by mobs of over 24 churches, the murders of two clerics in February 2013 and credible death threats received by key pastors soon thereafter, received greater attention following an acid attack on two British teenagers later that year.

The situation for Christians in Zanzibar remains concerning. Christians face restrictions when establishing places of worship, and in an extra-legal practice, the erection of a church building is dependent on permission from the local community: which is rarely if ever given. Sometimes church buildings are demolished without notice, as on 7 January 2018 when a bulldozer destroyed a building belonging to the Zanzibar Pentecostal Church of Jesus in Zanzibar Town, ostensibly to make way for a state university to use the land.

Many churches, including several that have obtained all necessary permissions, are embroiled in endless court cases, with hearings being repeatedly postponed. As a consequence, meagre church resources are depleted through the indefinite retention of lawyers from the mainland, since local practitioners refuse to take on such cases due to partisanship or fear.

Attacks on churches continue to occur sporadically. On 6 May 2018 plain-clothed policemen stormed the Sunday service of the Pentecostal Evangelistic Fellowship of Africa (PEFA) Church in Kisauni, seized the microphone from the church's leader, Pastor Daniel Kwilemba Kwiyea, and arrested him. When his daughter asked why her father was being arrested, she was slapped and also arrested. Both were later released without charge.

Christians are also expected to follow Islamic practices: on 16 June 2017 three Christians were arrested for cooking food in a private home in the middle of the day during the Ramadan fast.

Recommendations

- Raise violations of freedom of expression, association, assembly and religion or belief in appropriate high-level exchanges with the government of Tanzania.
- Emphasise the complementary nature of civil and political rights, and the rights to development and access to health and education, in exchanges with the government of Tanzania.
- Encourage the government of Tanzania to respect the rights and fundamental freedoms of journalists, government critics and religious leaders.
- Urge the government of Tanzania to expedite investigations into incidents of religion-related violence and bring perpetrators to justice.
- Encourage the government of Tanzania to revise the Media Services Act (2016) so that it complies with international standards of freedom of expression, and to end practices that restrict the freedoms of expression, association and assembly.
- Urge the government of Zanzibar to investigate all cases of religion-related violence, ensuring perpetrators are prosecuted regardless of creed.
- In light of constitutional and international commitments upholding freedom of religion or belief, urge the government of Zanzibar to end the practice of enforcing the Ramadan fast on non-Muslim citizens.
- Encourage the government of Zanzibar to end informal and extra-legal practices whereby church construction is dependent on permission from local communities, and ensure due process is followed in legal cases involving churches and their adherents.
- Encourage the government of Zanzibar to provide compensation to churches that have lost property either through mob attacks or through demolitions.

As Christians, we stand with everyone facing injustice because of their religion or belief.