

‘Can Christians Be Butchers?’ Islamist Tensions Continue

The recent attack on a mosque in Mwanza, northern Tanzania, has highlighted the area as one under growing pressure from political Islam.

More than three years have passed since the murder of a Tanzanian pastor, who was killed when rioting Muslims protested against Christians working as butchers. Tanzania is believed to have equal numbers of Christians and Muslims, although no official census figures are available. As Muslims are only permitted to eat meat that has been ritually slaughtered, while almost all Christians have no such restraints, it is typically considered acceptable for only Muslims to work in the trade, even though there is no official legislation to enforce this.

On Feb. 11, 2013, after Christians in the north-western city of Buseresere had arranged for a non-Muslim butcher to prepare meat for a Christian funeral reception, Mathayo Kachila, the pastor of the local Assemblies of God church, was hacked to death by rioters.

For six years before, tension had been building between Muslims and Christians in Buseresere over the issue of animal slaughter. The local government had forbidden non-Muslims from working as butchers, but Christians in the Geita district had begun to do so.

When Muslims heard that a non-Muslim was providing the meat for a funeral reception, they began looting Christian butcheries, urinating on the meat, and assaulting other Christian businessmen. Several were injured. Kachila was on his way to a friend's house, when he was caught in the riot and received fatal machete wounds. Another nine people were

injured.

Police arrested six suspects, but those cases have since stagnated due to lack of evidence and witnesses.

Hundreds of people attended Kachila's funeral. Although they live in a Muslim-dominated area, it was the first time anything like this had happened there, and the Christians were stunned.

Following the riots, police arrested and charged two local pastors, Obadiah Mlokozi Madini (who has since died) and Isaiah Rutha Ikiri (now 56), for "slaughtering animals without considering the law on food, medicine and law about livestock diseases." Their cases lasted for almost two years, before being dismissed early in 2015.

Geita's Regional Police Commander, Mponjoli Mwabulambo, told World Watch Monitor: "It has been our custom since the establishment of Tanzania—and even before—to see Muslims slaughter animals for public use, and we have not seen any problem. We have to care for our traditions and customs, which is to see Muslims doing this. If Christians slaughter animals, Muslims will not eat them. We feel that it will create violence in society, especially on the Muslim side."

But some Christians believe that the eating of halal meat goes against their religious beliefs.

There is also an economic element. The halal slaughtering service costs TShs500 (US\$) per chicken, 1,500 TShs (US\$) per goat/sheep and TShs2,500 (US\$) per cow, and customers are issued a receipt from the Tanzania Supreme Council of Muslims, to whom the remittances are paid.

Local Muslims also complained over losing income to Christian butchers, as demand for non-halal meat increased and more Christians took up the trade.

Kachila family struggles

Since Mathayo Kachila's death, his widow, Jane Roza, says she has felt completely overwhelmed by the financial pressures of trying to raise their 11 children alone.

"As the children grow, the economic burden I carry increases," she said. "Venant [24] is a second-year theology student, while Anna [26], Felister [21] and Samuel [19] are all seeking employment. The rest of the children, Elia [16], Annette [13], Benedict [11], Adellina [9], Edina [7], Joshua [5] and Arriet [3], will all need school fees and upkeep for many years to come.

"The stress about our future weighs particularly on Venant. He was very close to his father and still feels his absence deeply. He suffers from severe stress headaches whenever there is a monetary need in the family."

She said that it has also been hard for the family to see the chief suspect in her husband's murder walking around free.

Before he died, her husband identified a neighbor as his killer. Other witnesses said the same, but the man was arrested only to be set free shortly after. The man has since moved back home and the family sees him often.

"The children are emotionally affected when they see the person walking around freely. It is very painful to us all," Jane Roza said. "Even though the police have visited me a few times after the murder to interview me and promised to keep investigating, we do not know what happened to the case. I just don't know." {eoa}

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