

Convert from Islam in Uganda Survives Societal Hostilities

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.

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 (\$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.”