

Doctors Try to Save Remaining Eye of Ugandan Pastor

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 shariah (Islamic law) courts in Uganda, he said. On Oct. 15, 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."