

Kenya President Vows Not to Allow Radicalization in Worship Centers

Kenya's president said he would not allow places of worship to be used to radicalize young people, in the wake of a police raid on a mosque in the port of Mombasa that triggered renewed clashes with Muslim protesters on Friday.

Armed officers swooped on the Masjid Mussa mosque over the weekend, saying they had a tip-off youths were being trained there for militant attacks.

Police fired teargas and rubber bullets at youths who threw stones and looted shops on Friday, said witnesses, in the city's fourth significant outbreak of violence since the raid.

"Under no circumstance will we allow places of worship, like I said, be it a Hindu temple, a Muslim mosque, be it a Christian church, to be used as a place to radicalize and to threaten the lives of Kenyans," said President Uhuru Kenyatta.

He did not refer directly to the latest violence. But his comments underlined tensions in a country still reeling from an attack by Somali Islamists on a Nairobi shopping mall that killed at least 67 people in September.

The government has vowed to break up militant networks in a bid to end attacks by Somali Islamist militants and their sympathizers bent on punishing Kenya for sending troops to Somalia to fight al-Shabab rebels.

Kenyatta also launched the latest in a series of initiatives to tighten security, vowing to raise the number of police officers and giving other services targets to improve their operations.

Divide

Abel Mutisia, a shop keeper in Mombasa's run-down Kisauni area, said 20 young men whose faces were hidden by headscarves threw knives at him as he was closing down his store.

"They beat me up briefly and snatched 20,000 shillings (\$230) which I had sold," Mutisia said.

The violence has exposed deep-seated grievances by swathes of the Muslim community on the coast, especially youths, who say the mainly Christian government in Nairobi is persecuting them.

Kenyan Muslim leaders on Friday said a divide had grown between many youths and mainstream Muslim leadership but blamed heavy-handed tactics by the police for their radicalization.

"The actions by our security forces which include persistent police harassments and detentions, renditions and extra-judicial killings have alienated the youth and driven them to adopt radical ideas," Muslim leaders said in a statement read out by Kenyan senator Billow Kerrow in Nairobi's Jamia mosque.

"We strongly urge the government and in particular the security apparatus to put to an end these unfair policies which create resentment among Muslims and drive young men to conduct activities which are an affront to the rule of law."

Kenyan police deny brutality. They say officers came under fire as they burst into the mosque, where they seized laptops, DVDs and black banners emblazoned with jihadi slogans.

Kenyan security officials say the Masjid Mussa mosque is a hotbed of militant activity, in particular recruitment of disgruntled young Kenyan Muslims into local Islamist networks and al Shabaab in Somalia.

Police on Thursday released 21 minors but said they plan to

charge 104 people arrested since Sunday with being members of a terrorist group and some with possession of dangerous weapons, robbery and incitement to violence.

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