

Kenyan Pastors Ask for AK-47s Amid Radical Muslim Persecution

As attacks on **Christians** mount in Kenya's coastal region, some **evangelical** pastors in the Mombasa area may no longer be willing to turn the other cheek.

Worried about attacks against their churches and congregations, some pastors are asking for rifles to protect themselves from suspected **Islamic extremists**.

The violence intensified on Oct. 20 and 21, when two evangelical church **pastors** were killed inside their churches. Pastor Charles Mathole, 41, was killed Oct. 20 as he prayed inside his Vikwatani Redeemed Gospel Church. The following day, East African **Pentecostal** Church pastor Ibrahim Kithaka was found dead in Kilifi, about 35 miles north of Mombasa.

Christian leaders blame the attacks on increased radicalization of Muslim youth. The attacks have occurred amid protests by Muslims that they were being targeted in Nairobi's war against terrorism.

"Our many churches are not under any protection. They do not have walls or gates. The government should issue AK-47 rifles to every church so that we can stop them from being burnt, our property from being looted and our pastors and Christians from being killed," said Lambert Mbela, a pastor at Mathole's church, during his funeral.

Three weeks before the latest murders, Muslim youth torched a Salvation Army church in the Majengo area in Mombasa to protest the killing of the popular Sheikh Ibrahim "Rogo" Omar and three others by unknown gunmen on Oct. 4. The same church was torched last year after the murder of another prominent

Muslim cleric, Sheikh Aboud Rogo Mohammed.

Some church officials say the request for arms reflects a growing frustration with the rising insecurity, but others say the move contradicts traditional **biblical** teachings on nonviolence, or could put churches and congregations at more risk.

"I don't think arming Kenyan (clerics) will ensure security," said the Rev. Peter Karanja, the general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Kenya, at a news conference in Limuru, near Nairobi, on Wednesday (Oct. 30).

"However, the government should see this as writing on the wall. Kenyans are getting tired of the continuing insecurity."

Karanja challenged the government to marshal enough personnel and resources to improve security in churches, offices and homes without having to arm clergy. "What we do not agree with is that every pastor should be armed to ensure they are safe," he said.

Interfaith initiatives in the coastal region have allowed different faiths to live in relative calm, but the attacks are threatening decades of peaceful coexistence, according to the Rev. Wilybard Lagho, vicar general of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa.

"I think we need to restrengthen interreligious dialogue. The problem is in the minds, and we need to win them back," said Lagho, calling the request for guns a shallow solution to a complex problem.

Some Muslim leaders, meanwhile, have backed the pastors' call for arms but said there should be a thorough vetting of who gets a gun.

"It is a good idea, but not all clerics should get the guns. Some are rogue clerics and may pose more danger to other

religious leaders," said Sheikh Juma Ngao, chairman of the Kenya Muslim National Advisory Council.