

Tanzanian Church Bombing Kills 2, Injures More Than 50

St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Tanzania's northern city of Arusha was bombed Sunday, and at least two people are confirmed dead as a result of the blast. The BBC reported that as many as 50 people were wounded, including 44 of whom received serious injuries and were rushed to nearby hospitals.

The newly built church was packed with people gathering to celebrate its official opening. After the explosion, congregants fled the scene as quickly as possible.

"When it exploded, there was a stampede—people running in all directions, walking over each other. Children were screaming and women crying," a witness told Al-Jazeera.

"I saw a dead woman trampled. I think even her two children were killed in the same way," another witness added.

The Vatican's ambassador to Tanzania, Archbishop Francisco Montecillo Padilla, and the archbishop of Arusha were attending the service to oversee its official opening Mass. Both escaped the blast unharmed.

"There were so many people. The church was full, and the faithful were sitting on benches outside—it was a great day of celebration," a motorcycle taxi driver told Al-Jazeera.

The regional police commissioner of Arusha, Magesa Mulongo, told the press that eyewitnesses have reported that a bomb was thrown into the church from a motorcycle. The driver of the motorcycle has been arrested and "investigations are ongoing," Mulongo said to the French news agency AFP.

Tanzania's president, Jakaya Kikwete, has condemned the bombing as an "act of terrorism" and has vowed to bring those

responsible to justice. So far, eight suspects have been arrested in connection with the bombing, including four Tanzanians and four Saudi foreign nationals.

Worshippers have accused the authorities of failing to protect them as they attended church. "Religious fundamentalism is a reality in this country, but the government does nothing," Godbless Lema, a local member of parliament, told Al-Jazeera.

"Violent attacks against Christians in Tanzania have dramatically increased over the past year," says William Stark, International Christian Concern's regional manager for Africa. "So far this year, two pastors have been murdered by radical Muslims who are taking root in Tanzania. In February, Father Evarist Mushi, a Catholic priest, was murdered on the island of Zanzibar off Tanzania's east coast when two men, presumed to be Muslim extremists, shot him at the entrance of his church. A mass text message was then sent out to Christian leaders in Zanzibar, warning them that this attack was only the beginning and that they would be attacked again during the Easter holiday.

"These acts of terror must be seen as a series of escalating events that will continue to escalate unless action is taken by the Tanzanian government. Arresting and prosecuting the perpetrators of this bombing is commendable, but the government must take steps to ensure that these types of attacks are not repeated."

This article originally appeared on .