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Officials stop worship service as crackdown continues.

Morning Star News (24.05.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2kZNER> - The pastor of a church on Tanzania's semi-autonomous Zanzibar Island was preaching earlier this month when a plainclothes police officer and local officials strode into the church service.

"One of the police officers in civilian clothes walked through the church's door, stepped up to the podium and then grabbed the bishop by the arm," a church member told Morning Star News. "The bishop pleaded with him to allow him finish the preaching."

The congregation of the Pentecostal Evangelistic Fellowship of Africa (PEFA) church in Kisauni, near the Zanzibar City airport, was gripped with fear that day (May 6) as the pulpit microphone picked up Bishop Daniel Kwileba Kwiyeza's plea. The regional and local district commissioners ordered him to stop the worship service as the officer dragged him into a police car, said the church member, unidentified for security reasons.

"Why are you arresting my father without giving us the reasons for his arrest?" the pastor's daughter cried. "This is very inhumane."

The local district commissioner slapped her and pushed her into the police vehicle, the source said.

Other church members tried to intervene, in vain. Bishop Kwiyeza and his daughter were taken to the police station in Mazizini. The 160-member congregation went back into their church building and began praying for them.

"No one can take away our faith in Jesus Christ – Jesus is always with us and is ready to help us," a church elder told them.

Congregation members later went to the police station, where the chief officer told them there were no charges against the pastor and his daughter, and they were released later that day.

The incident followed an order to close the church after Muslim sheikhs from a nearby mosque complained that services on Sundays and weeknights were too loud – though the congregation does not use loudspeakers as the neighboring mosque does.

"We have the right to worship God just like our brothers the Muslims who worship God using loudspeakers, but no one terms their worship a nuisance," the church member told Morning Star News. "We as the church are of the opinion that the order to close the church is tainted with favoritism and unconstitutional."

On April 26, the regional and local district commissioners met with Muslim leaders on the church premises – without inviting the church leaders – and discussed the allegations that the church was becoming a nuisance to the community due to loud noise. The regional district commissioner then ordered the church be closed.

The church did not comply with the order since leaders had not been given the opportunity to defend themselves, the source said. The church instead filed an objection with the regional district commissioner.

"The church could have been given a hearing before such radical decision of closing the church was taken," he said. "This is quite unfair and contrary to the provision of the constitutional rights of freedom of worship of the United Republic of Tanzania."

Church members say the closure was a calculated move to weaken Christianity and do away with it in Zanzibar, off the coast of Tanzania, he said.

"The worship by the church should be respected as it is guaranteed by the constitution of Tanzania," the church member said.

Area Muslims did not complain about noise at the church until it completed a worship building with a seating capacity of 500 people in February, he said. Previously church members worshipped in a tent.

In March, authorities closed another church in Zanzibar when police pulled down the temporary structure of 50 iron sheets of the Free Pentecost Church of Tanzania in Kiwengwa, sources said. The congregation has yet to find another worship place.

On Jan. 7, local government officials in Zanzibar Town gave no prior warning to church leaders before a bulldozer arrived and razed the building of Zanzibar Pentecostal Church of Jesus to make way for a state university.
