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TANZANIA | Catholic Priest Injured In Acid Attack

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is deeply concerned by an acid attack on an elderly Catholic priest in Zanzibar Sept. 13. The incident, which is the latest in a series of assaults on churches and church leaders in the semi-autonomous archipelago, highlights a worrying deterioration in freedom of religion or belief in Tanzania.

Father Anselm Mwang'amba was attacked as he left an internet cafe in the historic Stone Town area of the Zanzibar capital and is currently hospitalized with severe burns to the face, neck and hands. According to a local report, while inside the café, Father Mwang'amba received a call from an unknown number and was doused with acid as he exited to answer his telephone.

The assault on Father Mwang'amba is the fourth major attack on a Christian leader in Zanzibar since December 2012, when a Catholic priest was wounded by unknown gunmen. Local Christians report receiving threats via text message or in leaflets naming church leaders who have been targeted for assassination, and in some instances referring to a prospective date. In February 2013, the murder of a Protestant pastor was followed a week later by the killing of a Catholic priest. In addition, at least 20 churches have been looted and either burnt or demolished, allegedly by supporters of the separatist religious movement Uamsho (Awakening). Perpetrators of religious violence are never brought to trial even when identified or caught in the act, and police investigations are generally extended indefinitely.

In a comment to CSW on the attack on Father Mwang'amba a local Christian, who preferred to remain anonymous, said, "We are asking the international community to intervene in this issue. Christians do not have any protection. In this environment we live in so much fear of what will happen to whom tomorrow."

CSW has also received reports of increasing discrimination on the Tanzanian mainland and an inadequate official response to religion-related violence. The family of a Pentecostal pastor beheaded in March 2013 in violence that erupted in Geita after the Muslim community objected to the opening of a Christian-owned butchery is still awaiting justice. Christians complain of the uneven

application of public order stipulations designed to maintain religious harmony, including discrimination in the granting of permits for open-air meetings and new media outlets. In May, people died and over 60 were injured when the inauguration service for a new Catholic Cathedral in Arusha was bombed in what the Tanzanian president described as a “terrorist attack.”

Daniel Sinclair, CSW Communications Director said, “Our thoughts and prayers are with Father Mwang’amba, who we wish a speedy recovery. These threats and attacks targeting church leaders and church buildings are in violation of the Tanzanian constitution, which provides for freedom of religion or belief. If left unchecked, religious violence will ultimately undermine national cohesion. CSW calls upon the Tanzanian authorities to take decisive action to tackle rising extremism and prevent impunity from taking hold in any part of the country. It is vital that the Government of Zanzibar effectively addresses attacks on the local Christian community, offers protection to all who are under threat, adequately compensates churches that have been looted or demolished, and ensures that inciters and perpetrators of religion-related violence are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.”