



7.10.17

TANZANIA | Christians Arrested for Cooking During Ramadan

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is concerned to learn that three Christians were arrested in Zanzibar on June 16 for cooking food in a private home during the Muslim Ramadan fast. They were released three days later following interventions by local church leaders, who are following up on the case.

Emmanuel Yohana, his wife Katherine Emmanuel and a woman identified as Khadija were arrested at noon June 16 at the couple's home. Local police led by the area district commissioner forcefully and unlawfully entered the property, where the two women were frying fish in the kitchen.

The three Christians were immediately arrested and informed that they had allegedly breached the law by cooking food during Ramadan. The police officer reportedly verbally abused them and allegedly said, "Today you will know how to fast."

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "These arrests were unjust and unwarranted. Not only were these Christians preparing food in a private home, but as non-Muslims they are under no obligation to observe the Ramadan fast. Moreover, their arrests are in violation of provisions within Tanzania's constitution that recognize the right to freedom of religion or belief and prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion. We urge the Government of Tanzania to intervene to ensure that constitutional provisions for the right to freedom of religion or belief are not only respected but also upheld by those tasked with enforcing the law."

While the majority of the population in Zanzibar follows Islam, the constitution of Tanzania declares the nation to be a secular state and protects freedom of religion or belief for all. However, the discrimination experienced by the Christian minority in Zanzibar is not confined to arrest for non-compliance with Islamic law or principles.

Christians are systematically prevented from building houses of worship, as local officials regularly impose extra-legal processes designed to prevent construction. For example, they are often required to obtain the permission of the community surrounding the proposed site for a church before construction can begin. Due to the religious demographics, local communities generally deny these requests. Houses of worship are also attacked periodically. Although such incidents are regularly reported to the authorities, the police and local government rarely pursue criminal cases against perpetrators, even when they are identified.

Thomas added, "We also urge the Government of Zanzibar to review local planning decisions and to bring an end to the discriminatory practices, which have no basis in law and prevent Christians from building houses of worship. Mindful of Tanzania's religious diversity, we urge the Government of Tanzania to prioritize the respect, promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief throughout the nation for all its citizens, regardless of their creed."