

Kenyan city of Mombasa tense after mosque closures

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NAIROBI, Kenya (RNS) Christian and Muslim leaders fear more violence in the coastal city of Mombasa after the government indefinitely closed four mosques over suspected terror activities.

On Friday (November 21), religious and political leaders united to urge the government to reopen the mosques. Muslim leaders accused the government of insensitivity, while Christian leaders feared being targeted in revenge attacks.

“We have always advised the government against adopting these counterproductive and draconian measures. It is unfortunate they ignored the Muslim leaders,” said Sheikh Abdulghafur El-Busaidy, the chairman of the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims.

In the first such move in Kenya’s history, the government announced the mosques closed after police raids earlier last week netted grenades, petrol bombs and ammunition. Recently, the mosques have been linked to Somali’s Islamist militants Al-Shabab. Black flags used by the militants were also seized, and more than 300 youths were arrested.

On Monday, Joshua Muteti, a local church pastor, died as gangs making revenge attacks rampaged on streets. Three other people were also killed.

“There is a lot of fear,” said Martin Wesonga of the Anglican Church in Mombasa. “People are not carrying Bibles openly. I am not wearing my clerical collar. I am anxious about this coming Sunday; armed gangs may pull Christians out of cars and buses and attack them.”

Recent unexplained killings of Christian and Muslim clergy by unknown gunmen is threatening to disrupt the fragile coexistence between the faiths in the region.