

Tanzania: Kikwete - Zanzibar Riots Shocking, Unacceptable

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Chaos aftermath: Passers-by watch as tyres burn following riots

President Jakaya Kikwete has said anyone with any views on the Union structure should await the Constitutional Review Commission which has been mandated with collecting people's views countrywide.

He said this on Friday evening in Dar es Salaam on his usual end-of-the month address to the nation, making reference to last week's riots in Zanzibar.

He described them as shocking, that such thing could happen in the guise of making a point against the Union.

He said: "These acts are unacceptable, intolerable and surprising because they have come at a time when the government has just officially opened doors for anyone to air their views in the Constitutional Review process, where sentiments such as those purported to be fought for by the rioters could be aired through dialogue."

Last weekend, the country awoke to the news of riots that engulfed downtown Zanzibar, ending with the burning of churches, clashes between police and protesters and the ultimate arrest of several rioters. During his address on Friday evening, President Kikwete, for the first time spoke about the riots describing them as 'shocking.'

He added, "Those are provisions in the Constitution. Therefore, what is being done by members of 'Uamsho' is not right. Maybe they have other agenda. What is surprising is eruption of this violence against the Union at a time when the government has given chance to everyone to give views in the constitutional dialogues.

"As we all know, the Constitutional Review Commission has already been sworn-in and would go across the country collecting people's views. If anyone has views that would be the correct time to air them. A better mechanism has been put in place, so why instigate violence? This can spoil the image of Zanzibaris and Tanzanians," he cautioned.

He said: "It is impossible for someone against the Union to make his argument by burning down people's property; Christianity was not brought to Zanzibar by the Union Government, but was in place centuries before the Union was in place and did not come from Tanzania Mainland."

He added, "And just like President, Dr Ali Mohamed Shein said, the truth is that Christianity or Islam came to mainland through Zanzibar. The Anglican church of Zanzibar was built starting 1873 and the Catholic Church in 1893. These are among the oldest churches than many in Zanzibar and mainland."

He explicitly pointed at the Islamic awakening movement (Uamsho) who he said have no right to disrupt peace of mainland and Zanzibar and instigating hatred against Christians and mainlanders.

"It is not good for a government to take serious steps against its citizens. But if it is the only option, the government can do it and will do so if need be. I urge leaders of Uamsho to refer again to the objectives of the foundation of their group and avoid instigating hatred and political agenda.

"I ask those with views on the Union, its structure and implementation to use the chance of constitutional debates and give their opinions. You don't have to be violent to give your views," he said. He also said that Dr Ali Mohamed Shein's efforts to explain that the constitution guarantees freedom to anyone to choose or change his or her faith or religion.

He said that in the past, the Uamsho group was bent on criticizing the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, but following the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) and now the process towards a new constitution, they have diverted their efforts to criticizing the Union, the founding fathers of the Union and the current leaders.

He also commiserated with those who lost property in the violence and assured them that the government, on both sides of the Union, would do everything in their means to maintain peace. He hailed the police force for containing the violent situation and urged Tanzanians to maintain their tradition of tolerance, coexistence, respect for each other and discussing where they have differences.

In his speech, President Kikwete first touched the issue of food security, adding that globally, there are 925 million people facing food shortage and poor nutrition out of which 239 million are in Africa.

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