Adventist family among victims of Nairobi terror attack
University lecturer killed in attack that took 60 lives

Adventist Church files lawsuit against U.S. city for ‘blatant’ religious liberty violation
Las Cruces, New Mexico imposing registration requirements, fees on some churches

New audio player offers book collection to blinded veterans
Adventist ministry creates solar-powered device to provide encouragement

Adventist family among victims of Nairobi terror attack
An Adventist family is among those affected by the terrorist attack in Nairobi’s Westgate Shopping Mall in which more than 60 people were killed and more than 170 injured.

Reports indicate that at least one Adventist family from Nairobi lost a relative who was in the capital city’s Westlands area at the time. Harun Oyieke, a lecturer at Co-operative University College of Kenya, was among those killed in the attack. He was the husband of Florence Awino, a professor at the University of Nairobi.

The attack occurred at about 11 a.m. on Saturday. Between 10 and 15 terrorists armed with automatic weapons and grenades attacked the shopping mall and killed 60 people, leaving at least 170 others wounded. At the time of filing this report Monday night, at least 50 people were still missing according to Red Cross officials.

Among those killed were South African, American, Ghanaian, French, Netherlands, Australian, British, Chinese, Dutch, Indian and Canadian nationals. Several members of the Kenyan police and military were also killed or wounded in the attack as they attempted to rescue hostages.

World leaders, including UN secretary general Ban-ki Moon and U.S. President Barack Obama, condemned the attack and expressed condolences with those who had lost relatives and friends.

“This is a time of shock for all Kenyans and all – including the UN family – who are proud to call Nairobi home,” Ban-ki Moon said in a statement. “I express my solidarity with them at this moment of grief and loss.”

The siege continued into the early hours of Monday night, when the Kenyan forces broke through and released the remaining hostages. The Somali Islamist al-Shabaab militants claimed responsibility for the attack.

A survivor, Jackson Mwema, was quoted in The Standard as saying the attackers released some hostages. “They were asking our names and demanding that we read some information I couldn’t understand,” Mwema said.

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, who lost his nephew and the nephew’s fiancée in the attack, condemned the terrorists, saying his government would not allow them to break the country’s unity along religious lines.

Reports said the attackers who had been dropped off at the mall in three cars overwhelmed security
guards by shooting shoppers indiscriminately. They besieged the mall and held scores of shoppers hostage as they exchanged fire with Kenyan police and the military. TV footage and pictures showed bewildered children standing next to dead bodies and wounded shoppers in and outside the mall.

Kenyans responded to the attack by donating blood for the victims and sending messages of hope. The national blood bank had exceeded its annual average of 4,000 liters, and over Sh50 million (US$600,000) was collected in two days. The Adventist Church in Kenya gave a check of Sh1 million ($12,000). Vice President William Ruto said Kenyans had defeated evil by meeting it with kindness.

Adventist Church files lawsuit against U.S. city for ‘blatant’ religious liberty violation

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Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

The Seventh-day Adventist Church last week filed a lawsuit against the city of Las Cruces in the U.S. state of New Mexico over an ordinance church lawyers say violates religious expression and unfairly targets pastor-led faith groups, especially Latino churches.

Earlier this year, city officials threatened to take legal action if the Las Cruces Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church failed to comply with the requirements of the business registration ordinance.

Las Cruces Ordinance No. 16-131 defines a business as “any profession, trade or occupation and all and every kind of calling,” including the work of pastors, priests, rabbis, bishops, imams and other religious leaders.

The ordinance ostensibly requires all pastor-led churches within city limits to register with the city, pay a registration fee and pass a discretionary review process before gaining approval to conduct worship services or provide pastoral care. Faith groups that are lay-led rather than clergy-led are not subject to the requirements, lawyers said.

According to a complaint filed by the church in the U.S. District Court of New Mexico, there is no timeframe for an approval, and no avenue for appeal if the city denies an application.

“I’ve never seen anything like this. It blatantly goes against the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution,” said Todd McFarland, an associate General Counsel for the Seventh-day Adventist world church.
Further troubling church lawyers, the ordinance requires separate registrations for each location that business is conducted. Lawyers said this stipulation could require pastors to obtain special permission before visiting sick members, providing off-site counseling or conducting evangelism.

“Such religious speech and activities frequently occur in private homes, public meeting places, hospitals and funeral homes as a result of regularly occurring life events with very little if any advance notice,” the complaint stated. “It is impossible for an applicant subject to the ordinance to provide accurate information because many pastoral activities are a response to unpredictable events.”

Church lawyers also said the ordinance is “impermissibly vague” because it fails to specify what actions fall under the definition of “calling” and thus require separate advance approval.

A list of exemptions to the requirements, including certain athletic officials and artists, “favor non-religious speech over religious speech,” the complaint stated, noting that the ordinance “overturns” protections provided by Article II, section 11 of the New Mexico Constitution.

According to the complaint, “these protections were intended to provide religious speech with more, not less, protection than speech related to a ball game, a portrait of a family pet or other ‘art’ product.”

Meanwhile, Las Cruces city officials maintain that the ordinance is meant to benefit citizens.

“The City of Las Cruces believes that its requirements to have businesses, including churches, within city limits have a business license meets the city’s obligations to provide its citizens with fire and police protection and comply with the Constitution,” Williams Babington Jr., deputy city attorney for Las Cruces, said by email.

“The City trusts that the courts will agree with its position,” Babington added.

There are more than 100 churches within Las Cruces city limits, but the ordinance, Adventist lawyers said, has been applied only to a small percentage of these churches and, according to the complaint, “disparately applied to single out Hispanic and Latino churches.”

In June, the Las Cruces Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church was first notified that it had seven days to comply with the requirements or face “court action,” according to a letter from the city’s Codes Enforcement Department. However, the Las Cruces Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, a majority non-Latino congregation, received no such notice.

“This problem came to us; we didn’t go looking for it,” said McFarland, who is representing the Las Cruces Spanish Adventist Church and the Texico Conference.

The U.S. District Court of New Mexico has not yet set a trial date.

The Adventist Church’s Texico Conference oversees church operations in West Texas and New Mexico, where it maintains 80 churches and supports a membership of 12,000.

New audio player offers book collection to blinded veterans
Christian Record Services for the Blind this week launched a new project to support veterans blinded in the line of military duty.

InSight4Vets is a pocketsize solar-powered audio player pre-loaded with books that CRSB officials hope will help guide blinded veterans through a difficult adjustment period.

“The audio player is filled with stories about overcoming during the worst possible circumstances, stories of survival, stories of hope and stories of transformation,” said Larry Pitcher, CRSB president.

“It’s our privilege to share this gift with those coming home from military service without sight,” he said.

CRSB officials say the project was inspired by news reports identifying eye trauma as the second most common injury among active military members. There are currently close to 160,000 blind veterans and 1 million partially sighted vets in the United States, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

“Unfortunately, an unseen wound of war—the inner anguish of sight loss—often becomes greater than the physical injury itself,” Pitcher said. “It’s to address these emotional, social and spiritual injuries that InSight4Vets was developed.”

George Haley, a blind veteran from the U.S. state of Michigan and a project consultant, said he was surprised that the audio player contained seven complete books, including “Take the Risk” by renowned neurosurgeon Dr. Ben Carson and “The Blessing of Adversity” by U.S. Senate Chaplain Barry Black.

“In a small package I can carry with me a great amount of material that’s encouraging, entertaining, educational and inspiring,” Haley said. The audio player is smaller than an iPhone and contains about one hundred hours of listening. The device can be charged by solar power or another light source, through USB cable or through the accompanying plug-in charger.

“As grateful as we are, and as much as we would like to, we cannot restore sight to veterans who have lost it. But we can give them insight and hope … through this 'library in your pocket' player,” said
Dick Stenbakken, retired U.S. Army chaplain, whose book, “The Centurion,” is also included in the player.

Gary Councell, director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries and also a retired U.S. Army chaplain, said InSight4Vets goes a long way toward supporting an often-overlooked segment of population.

“By providing such an important service, Christian Record is contributing to mending a hold in the social safety net by reaching out to a small—yet so very important—group of people,” Councell said.

Initial start-up support for the InSight4Vets project came from individual donors and a Versacare grant. The Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries at Seventh-day Adventist world church headquarters is a project co-sponsor.

Established by the Adventist Church in 1899, Christian Record Services for the Blind offers a library of Braille, large print publications and audio recordings to a potential audience of 39 million blind and low sight people in the U.S. The ministry also operates a system of summer camps for blind children across North America.

Visit insight4vets.org to learn more.

The ANN news bulletin is a weekly recap of news and information from the Communication department of the Seventh-day Adventist world church headquarters and is distributed by Adventist News Network.

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