

Muslim clerics disappearing near Kenya-Somalia border

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#) in the [January 4, 2017](#) issue

As Kenyan coastal region sheikhs, imams, and preachers vanish in alleged killings and forced disappearances, their wives are demanding answers.

The clerics have disappeared or died after security service involvement.

“The common thread is all the victims are Muslims,” said Hussein Khalid, “perceived by authorities to be actual or potential terror suspects.”

Khalid is executive director of Haki Africa, a human rights organization that has been offering legal aid for victims’ families.

According to activists, the clerics’ alleged crimes included radicalizing youth, facilitating attacks, and recruiting for al-Shabaab, the al-Qaeda affiliate in Somalia. Kenya deployed troops to neighboring Somalia in 2011 to fight al-Shabaab but has since suffered several terrorist attacks on its own soil.

Three years ago, Saada Juma Seleman’s husband, Hemed Salim Ahmed, disappeared when the police stormed the Masjid Musa after allegations surfaced that it was hosting terrorism training. He has not been seen again.

Now, Seleman, a mother of three, is out of responses to her nine-year-old son, who wants to see his father.

“I have given him all kinds of explanations, but now I don’t know what to tell him,” she said. “It’s painful and traumatizing.”

Haki Africa has documented 81 such cases from 2012 to 2016 in a report titled *What Do We Tell the Families?*

The report, released in December, indicates the killings increased after Kenyan troops entered Somalia in 2011 in pursuit of al-Shabaab.

The disappearances peaked after the September 2013 Westgate Mall massacre, in which attackers killed 67 Christians after separating them from Muslims.

A police spokesman, George Kinoti, released a statement in response to the report.

“The National Police Service rejects the allegations as based on unfounded distortions of the real facts,” Kinoti said. “We also reject totally claims of religious profiling as we only focus on criminals irrespective of their religious affiliation.”

Christian clergy said that while they support the government rooting out terrorism, they do not support the disappearances and killings.

“We urge the government to investigate, since these killings cause unnecessary fear among the families,” said Anglican bishop Julius Kalu of Mombasa. “We want to live in peace. The government should take control.” —Religion News Service