

Anglicans in Zimbabwe say pro-Mugabe clerics are disrupting churches: Harassment by police

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Anglicans in Zimbabwe say that clerics loyal to President Robert Mugabe have marshalled the national police to disrupt services in the country's capital city of Harare.

For instance, police went to the parishioners of St. Michael's Mbare church on December 6 and told them to vacate their church ahead of the Sunday service. The parishioners refused to move and demanded to see written court documents, said the Association of Zimbabwe Journalists.

The account by the journalists' group said that an inspector who led the police action stated they were acting on "orders and instructions from above" but that he failed to produce written evidence of the instructions.

Bishop Chad Gandiya of the Anglican Diocese of Harare of the Church of the Province of Central Africa, who had been at St. Michael's to confirm 100 people, said rogue police officers were abusing their office instead of maintaining law and order.

"As Anglicans it seems we have no legal recourse in this country," he said. "The police are interfering in our church services without restraint and continue to defy existing court orders. The police are supposed to be protecting us but they are the ones harassing us."

Gandiya said about eight parishes in Harare were prevented from holding services in their own buildings by the police. "The police have had no court orders to prevent people from using their buildings. All they could tell us when we asked them was that they were following orders from above."

Gandiya succeeded Sebastian Bakare, a retired cleric who served as the diocese's interim bishop beginning in December 2007 when Bishop Nolbert Kunonga was

deposed for installing himself as archbishop of Zimbabwe. Kunonga has said a number of times he believed the church that excommunicated him was too cozy with homosexuals.

As an avowed supporter of Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe and his Zanu-PF party, Kunonga has supported the intimidation and persecution of Anglicans in Zimbabwe, many Anglicans say.

Gandiya became Harare bishop despite a bid by Kunonga to block the consecration. Kunonga claims he is still the legitimate head of the Anglican church in Zimbabwe. - *Ecumenical News International*