

Gays flee as irate residents storm venue of seminar

Police boss and district officer whisk away five participants to safety as mob bays for their blood

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A mob yesterday stormed the venue of a meeting of homosexuals, scattering the delegates.

About 30 participants scamped from the Likoni CDF Youth Empowerment and Library Centre through the back when about 100 youth led by religious leaders and village elders forced their into the venue.

Five Coast gay leaders, however, were not so lucky as the youths blocked the escape route and seized them.

They were held captive in the building for three hours as residents bayed for their blood.

The five were saved by Likoni police boss Abagarro Guyo and district officer Moses Ouma who ordered the seminar closed. The five were bundled into a private car and whisked away under tight security.

"Everybody is ordered to vacate these premises. The seminar is terminated immediately and the place closed," said Mr Guyo.

Sheikh Amir Zani of the Muzadhafa mosque described the seminar as illegal, ungodly and unacceptable. He threatened to mobilise the community to cane the gays if they organised such a meeting again.

"The government should stop this or we will act as a community," Sheikh Zani declared.

Mombasa Network for Human Rights organising secretary Ali Kigarimbwe accused the organisers of denigrating the youth centre.

Sauti ya Likoni lobby group chairman Hamisi Hassan Ng'anzi said residents were shocked that such a seminar could be held in their midst.

"Many workshops of this kind have been held, purportedly to impart safe sex skills to the youth but they are actually business ventures.

"Why is drug abuse on the rise? These workshops don't have any meaning," he said.

A village elder, Mr Daniel Baridi, said all seminars at the centre should be vetted and approved by community leaders.

"We established this centre to help our youth but it is being abused. We will not allow such activities," he said.

But the Ministry of Youth and Sports district officer, Mr David Ogal, defended the organisers

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The number of people who were attending the seminar

WHAT'S ALLEGED

Why centre was invaded

Religious leaders: Sheikh Amir Zani said the seminar was illegal and ungodly and unacceptable.

Lobby groups: Accused organisers of denigrating the ideals behind setting up of centre, which they said was being used by unscrupulous people to make money.

Villagers elders: Centre is not being used for purposes for which it was set up.



DANIEL NYASSY | NATION

Angry youths try to block NTV cameraman Karim Rajan from taking pictures of a group of gays who had congregated at the Youth Empowerment and Library Centre in Likoni for a workshop yesterday.

of the seminar and accused residents of misunderstanding their aims.

"Here we are dealing with very vital education to vulnerable groups, including drug users, commercial sex workers, gays and others. We are offering peer and HIV/Aids education to the youth because they are at the highest risk of infection," he told the press.

Mr Ogal said the ministry's job was to help impart life skills to the youth and vulnerable groups whose HIV infection is twice that of other groups.

"I am a youth officer and charged with this responsibility. The gay community, like other groups, approached us and requested to be educated on safe

sex. They have a right to safe sex. By doing this, we are not promoting homosexuality but imparting knowledge. There is a lot of social discrimination and stigma about the issue and we as a society must fight it," he said.

The seminar participants were aged between 20 and 30, said the officer, adding that his ministry would make youth funds available to all groups as they had a right.

The seminar was organised and sponsored by the Kenya NGO Consortium and Constitutional Aids Control Council, which Mr Ogal said paid them a daily allowance of Sh1,000 "for lunch and transport" for each participant.

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Sauti ya Likoni chairman Hamisi Hassan Ng'anzi