The Founding of *Baraza Kuu*  
*(The Supreme Council of Islamic Organisations and Institutions of Tanzania)*

By Mohamed Said

By 1990s BAKWATA was literally dead. Its decision to appease the government and to distance itself from each and every Muslims issue made it irrelevant. Yet its leadership had the audacity to blame the government that it had not supported it by allowing other independent organisations to exist. On 17 April, 1991 during an Idd Baraza at Arnautoglo Hall, Dar es Salaam President Mwinyi was invited to the occasion by BAKWATA as a guest of honour. In his speech to welcome the president, the Vice-Chairman of BAKWATA, Suleiman Hegga accused the government of indecision in hesitating to curb Muslim groups which in his views were undermining BAKWATA. Hegga’s speech was in fact a lament to the government that it had withdrawn its support to a long time ally in face of opposition from a common foe.¹

In his reply President Mwinyi told the BAKWATA leadership to stop complaining and advised them to convene a meeting of all Muslim organisations to discuss whatever differences BAKWATA might be having with Muslims. This advice by the government was ignored by BAKWATA. What BAKWATA envisaged was for the government to use its powers to effect a crackdown of those independent Muslims organisations to enable BAKWATA enjoy centre stage in Muslims affairs. Muslims had long decided that the only way forward was for each organisation in its locality

to try and help Muslims in its own way. As these Muslims became engaged in various activities from building simple *madras* to providing tuition to school children BAKWATA increasingly became redundant and hence the statement by BAKWATA that the government was allowing other Muslim organisations to “meddle” into their exclusive zone, that of preventing Muslims to have any influence in the political system.

It was now obvious that BAKWATA did not command support or respect of Muslims. It did not have a competent leadership in terms of education and experience to administer such an organisation. BAKWATA did not have a single graduate in its administrative machinery. It had become the norm rather than the exception that in order for a Muslim to be accepted in BAKWATA his education has to be mediocre. Since Muslims were supportive to these independent organisation it was felt that it was high time for this loose leadership to manifest itself and take-over the leadership BAKWATA for the good of Islam. This act it was felt was important and necessary in order to formalise and confirm its status as the true Muslim representative.

The only organisation thought fit to co-ordinate all those Muslim organisations and convene a meeting to discuss the future of Islam in Tanzania was the Dar es Salaam University Muslim Trusteeship (DUMT). DUMT convened a meeting in which all Muslim organisations based in Dar es Salaam including BAKWATA were invited. The agenda of the meeting was how to solve the leadership crisis in BAKWATA. The meeting was held at the University of Dar es Salaam and was chaired by Tewa Said
The Supreme Council of Islamic Organisations and Institutions Conference 15 - 16 June 2008

Tewa the former chairman of the EAMWS. BAKWATA refused to attend this meeting. Several meetings were to be held at the university under the chairmanship of DUMT between July and September, 1991. Emissaries were sent to the regions to consult with the independent Muslim leadership on the possibility of convening a national Muslim conference to debate on the future of Islam in Tanzania. The responses from the regions were very encouraging. BAKWATA tried its best to sabotage the conference. It sent its own emissaries to the region to try to persuade Muslims not to attend the conference. It also sent a letter to the government to ask its intervention to stop the conference.

On 15 September, 1991 a National Muslim Conference was held at Nkrumah Hall of Dar es Salaam University. Appreciating the sensitivity of Muslim politics the select committee which was co-ordinating Muslim affairs sent each and every minute of the meeting to the President’s Office. President Mwinyi realising religious issues which required government intervention, had established a special desk of religious affairs. President Mwinyi sent Abdulrahman Kinana, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation to open the conference. Kinana delivered a message from the government which said that the government would cooperate with Muslims in finding a solution to their problems so long as Muslims pursued their goal peacefully.

2 It should be beared in mind that organised effort to emanse support from Muslims had begun in 1987 and several meetings were held in Dar es Salaam under different venues. See minutes: Muhtasari wa Kikao cha Kamati ya Kupendekeza Muundo wa Chombo Kilichofanyika Tarehe 17/9/89 Shule ya Haramein. Contents of the minutes show that the thrust of the meeting was to forge unity among different da’awa groups and avoid duplication of efforts.

3 The night before in an attempt to play down the Muslim National Conference the state-radio announced in its prime time news bulletin that the conference was for delegates from Dar es Salaam only.
In the history of Muslim movement in Tanzania never before had such a huge number of Muslim activists assembled in one place. Delegates came as far as Kagera and Rukwa. All who rose to speak had nothing but condemnation for the leadership in BAKWATA and none was more vocal than Sheikh Kassim bin Juma. In his speech to the delegates he said he supported the new initiative to provide a strong and dependable leadership to Muslims of Tanzania but was worried with the factor that the leadership which was poised to lead Muslims was comprised of the Ansar (Orthodox Muslims). The conference by acclamation ousted the BAKWATA leadership from power except the Grand Mufti Sheikh Hemed bin Juma bin Hemed on the ground that it did not have qualifications to lead a Muslim organisation. A 15-man caretaker committee under Sheikh Salum Khamis, a retired civil servant and a graduate Makerere College was elected and given the task to prepare for general election to enable Muslims choose its own leadership freely.

The committee was to run the organisation for an interim period of three months after which a general election was to be called. Its other task was to give BAKWATA direction according to the Holy Qur’an and Sunna of the Prophet (SAW). But its most important responsibility was the amendment of the constitution passed in Iringa in 1968 and change of the official name. This had a special significance to Muslims and the organisation as a whole because the amendment of the constitution and change of name meant a break with the dark past. The BAKWATA constitution was a replica of the constitution of the then ruling party TANU. The committee issued a statement which stated that:
BAKWATA had been used to control Muslims instead of dealing with their development. As a result of this Muslims in different parts of the country had formed their own organisations to look after their religious interests. There was a lot of animosity between the council and the various organisations which effected the development of Muslims in the country.  

It is said that at this juncture the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) sent a secret delegation to the Minister of Home Affairs Augustine Mrema to request him to use his powers to prevent the new Muslim leadership from coming to power in BAKWATA for what it feared was a strong Muslim independent leadership which will challenge Christian hegemony wherever it existed and would promote “Muslim fundamentalism.” The Caretaker Committee requested a meeting with the Minister of Home Affairs and the Registrar of Societies in order to have their co-operation for a peaceful and orderly transition but all of them refused to meet the Committee. The Registrar of Societies wrote to the committee accusing it of flouting the constitution.

Meanwhile rumours were circulating in Dar es Salaam that BAKWATA leadership had asked Nyerere to intervene and use his powers to prevent the new leadership into coming to power. This rumours incensed Muslims and hostility to BAKWATA leadership was intensified to the extent that it had to be provided with security by the government. Sheikh Hemed bin Juma the Grand Mufti nor the Acting Secretary General Rajab Kundya, who was at the centre of criticism because he was married to a Christian,

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could freely go to their offices for fear of being physically attacked by Muslims. BAKWATA was overwhelmed by hostility from the Muslim community. Meanwhile the BAKWATA leadership under the Grand Mufti Sheikh Hemed bin Juma refused to hand over power to the popular will of Muslims. BAKWATA issued a statement which stated that the constitution of the organisation protected its leadership from being ousted and therefore the leadership was still in power.\(^5\) By the end of December signs of violent change were evident.

On 4th January, 1992 Muslims held a meeting at the Diamond Jubilee Hall. This followed the conference held at the Nkrumah Hall in September, 1991. It was at that conference that Muslims were informed that even as they were deliberating in the hall, the committee had ordered the invasion of BAKWATA headquarters and Dar es Salaam regional office including Al Haramain School. The conference was informed that the offices have been secured and occupied. President Mwinyi intervened and called a meeting in his office between the Grand Mufti Sheikh Hemed bin Juma and his executive committee and the Caretaker Committee of Sheikh Salum Khamis.

The Caretaker Committee told the president that it would accept nothing short of resignation of the Vice-Chairman Suleiman Hegga, a former broadcaster and Acting Secretary General Rajab Kundya, who was at the centre of criticism for being married to a Christian. These people the committee reiterated were not fit to lead Muslims. It was then decided to resolve the crisis on the following terms:

\(^5\) Mfanyakazi, 18 September, 1991.
1. The crisis should be solved through due process of law. BAKWATA offices forcefully occupied by the committee should be opened and its officials allowed to perform their duties.

2. All executive posts in BAKWATA should be advertised to enable qualified Muslims apply.

3. BAKWATA and Baraza Kuu should form a committee of five persons each forming a central committee of 10 members which would be required to do the following:
   i. To conduct elections from grassroots level of the mosques up to national level
   ii. To prepare proposal for a new constitution.

The president ordered the two parties to solve the leadership crisis fast and peacefully and ended with a threatening note to the two parties that if they disturbed the peace the government will come very strong against them. The Committee assured the President that it would solve the Muslim crisis sensibly.

While the committee fulfilled its part of the agreement, BAKWATA did not adhere to the above and refused to fulfil theirs. The Grand Mufti chose to snub President Mwinyi. On 12 February, in a live broadcast from Songea during Maulid celebrations, Sheikh Hemed bin Jumaa sneered at the efforts of the President arguing that president Mwinyi was involving himself in trying to effect changes to BAKWATA without being conversant with its history and objectives; and without knowing why it was formed by the government of Julius Nyerere in the first place.\(^6\)

\(^6\) Part of the speech appears verbatim in *An-Nuur*, June, 1993, “Mufti Hemed Afichua Siri Kubwa.”
Failing to dislodge BAKWATA from its offices the committee decided to lodge its own application to the Registrar of Societies for registration. Muslims had come up with an innovation which would force the government to officially allow another national Muslim organisation to operate and serve the Muslim community. The government sat on the application for more than a year. Meanwhile *Baraza Kuu* continued to operate and enjoy Muslim support. The vacuum created by BAKWATA for its non-compliance of the wishes of Muslims was ably filled by *Baraza Kuu*. 7

On 28 April, 1993 bizarre occurrence took place. In desperation and in its effort to salvage BAKWATA the Minister of Home Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister Augustine Mrema convened a meeting between Muslims and Christians at the Diamond Jubilee Hall, Dar es Salaam. The agenda was not stated. The Church sent a strong delegation. Muslims abstained except BAKWATA. The few Muslims who turned up were there out of curiosity rather than conviction that the meeting would bear fruits. When the time for introduction between the two parties came, Muslims refused to shake hands with the Church leadership. Mrema addressed the meeting in which in his speech it was revealed that elections for BAKWATA were long overdue and could not be held because of lack of funds.

The Church volunteered to provide funds to BAKWATA to enable it hold its elections. The Minister for Home Affairs Augustine Mrema also helped to collect money from the business community to fund BAKWATA.

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elections. When eventually BAKWATA met in Dodoma from 10th -12th May the guest of honour was Augustine Mrema. Instead of conducting elections BAKWATA passed some constitution changes to empower the Grand Mufti Sheikh Hemed bin Hemed with absolute powers to fire any executive member without being answerable to anyone.

The government reluctantly registered Baraza Kuu. Much as Baraza Kuu has the support of Muslim majority the government still refuses to recognise it throwing its weight and support behind BAKWATA. In response to this Muslims have refused to recognise BAKWATA and so for forty years since its imposition on Muslims by the government in 1968 the standoff between Muslims on one hand and BAKWATA and the government on the other lingers on.

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