

The attempt by the SDA Church to baptize Obama's Kenyan grandma flops

Kenyan Muslims, relatives resist baptism of Obama's grandma

Baptism of Obama's Kenyan grandma flops

Mama Sarah, Obama's step grandma, was at the center of controversy when a Protestant church tried to baptize her Saturday

Obama's church

NAIROBI (AlArabiya.net)

A Protestant church in Kenya tried to convert U.S. President Barack Obama's step-grandmother to Christianity, allegedly against her will, sparking controversy among Muslim groups in Kenya that condemned the move Monday and criticized the church for pressuring the family since Obama's presidency.

The Seventh Day Adventist Church in the western town of Kisumu, 236 miles away from Nairobi and the third largest city in Kenya, invited 87-year-old Sarah Obama -- a Muslim -- to a function last Saturday, where she was allegedly to be baptized.

Relatives in her village of Kogelo said "Mama Sarah," as she is popularly known in the U.S. president's paternal homeland, was surprised by the offer and declined to attend.

"I regret the attempt by the Christian religion to force her to convert," Sheikh Mohamed Khalifa, the organizing secretary of the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya, was quoted as saying by AFP.

"Why only her? Why not before Obama became president? Didn't they see her before he became president? We are ready to protect our religion," he said.

"I regret the attempt by the Christian religion to force her to convert "

Sheikh Mohamed Khalifa,
Council of Imams of Kenya

But other Kenyan press reports quoted the church's priest Tom Obiya saying she had already converted, but her relatives prevented her from leaving to the church event to get baptized.

Mama Sarah gave contradictory statements about her religious affiliations

"Mama Sarah confirmed to us her conversion to Christianity and we were ready to baptize her but it appears her family convinced her otherwise," Obiya was quoted as saying.

Reports said 'Mama Sarah' was to be baptized at a ceremony at the Jomo Kenyatta stadium, 60 miles away from her home, as the culmination of a three-week conference on Christian proselytism.

Khalifa denounced the move as a "provocation," and said the church does not have the right to convert anyone. "They don't have permission from Jesus to convert someone. I challenge them to quote a verse from the Bible allowing them to convert someone," he said.

"It was a right thing for the family members of Mama Sarah to stop the SDA pastor from baptising her. They acted according to the requirements of the Muslim faith. A Muslim should continue to remain in his faith," Sheikh Khalifa told Kenya's Daily Nation newspaper.

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Obama's church

Relatives of Obama with evangelist John Jeremic (L) at a service organized by the church

The Seven Day Church, located in Kogelo where Obama's father was born, was dubbed "Obama's Church" after Obama became the first black president in the U.S.

Kisumu's Mung'oma Seventh Day Adventist Church was renamed after the famous grandson and is

service organised by the church

Nisumu's Nyang'oma Seventh Day Adventist Church was renamed after the famous grandson and is now called the Obama Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Said Obama, a step-brother to the U.S. president, said the church pastors approached Sarah Obama with news that she could become a Christian.

"Mama (Sarah) was born a Muslim and wishes to die a Muslim. The issue of conversion is neither here nor there," he said, adding that he requested his mother not to attend the event after he learned she was invited to a church service despite being Muslim.

Mama Sarah herself has given different responses to her religious status on two occasions. In April 2008 she was quoted in the New York Times as saying "I strongly believe in Islam." However 11 months later, when rumors that Obama was a closet Muslim spread during the campaign, she refuted the rumors in USA Today saying that "I am also a Christian."

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She became a national celebrity when her grandson visited the country in 2006 and her modest home and village have become tourist attractions since the former Illinois senator's Nov. 2008 election triumph. Last month the Kenyan government declared Sarah's village Kogelo a national heritage site.

Khalifa, Council of Imams on Kenya

<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/04/20/71069.html>