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Religious man's murder rap offends church

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CHURCH elder Walter Qusheka had lectured groups of worshippers about the Bible before he was implicated in a murder investigation.



IN JEOPARDY: Walter Qusheka in a 2005 file picture.

Jehovah's Witnesses abhor any killing, even in wars Picture: TIRSA ELLIS

" 'Even a command to beat another man, and that man dies, makes him guilty before God' "

The businessman, who recently landed a R25-million government tender, faces a charge of murder in a case that has shaken the local chapter of Jehovah's Witnesses in Mthatha, Eastern Cape.

Qusheka's company, Qush Cleaning Services, has a three-year contract to provide cleaning services to the local Mthatha Hospital Complex.

But it was at his hardware store in a small village near Mthatha that one of his employees got beaten to death three months ago.

Sakhumzi Ncedana was tied to a pole and beaten viciously, allegedly by Qusheka and four security guards. The Qunu-born victim's family is still "too traumatised" to talk about his death.

Prosecutors at the court in Bityi, where Qusheka and his four security guards appeared two weeks ago, said the victim was allegedly beaten for driving one of his employer's trucks into a ditch, getting it stuck.

Qusheka, 37, is alleged to have instructed the guards to assault the driver. The men are out on R1500 bail each. They have not pleaded.

Following his arrest, Qusheka told fellow Jehovah's Witnesses elders that the beating was administered by his

security staff.

Jehovah's Witnesses have strict views on killing. White members of the church refused to be conscripted into the defence force, as apartheid laws ordered them to do, because they are forbidden to kill .

Frans Muller, head of the Watchtower society, which furthers the interests of Jehovah's Witnesses in South Africa, said an internal committee would investigate the matter.

"We take a firm stand on murder and have a definite policy to look into anything done by people who deliberately violate principles. People make mistakes and we are merciful when that happens."

But, he said, "scriptural principle" forbade, among other things, murder, fornication, theft and adultery and action could therefore be taken against Qusheka. "Even if it is for so much as giving the command that this man be beaten, leading to his death, he is responsible, even if not directly. A command to beat another man, and that man dies, makes him guilty before God," said Muller.

A meeting was held by elders on February 11 to determine Qusheka's fate. No action has been taken yet.

Mark Sherwood, also an elder at the church, said on Thursday that the matter was still "under consideration". He denied that Qusheka was still actively involved in the church's leadership.

Within months of joining the Qunu congregation, Qusheka gave a lecture at the Walter Sisulu University of Technology to worshippers on how to teach their families about the Bible and how to interpret it.

In three weeks, Qusheka did not respond to a number of voice messages and SMSes left on his cellphone, and messages left with his relatives elicited no reaction either.

Qush Holdings Group is a 100% black-owned firm that has spawned several businesses in the province, including security services, pest control, cleaning and gardening services, and cartage services.

Eastern Cape Health Department spokesman Sizwe Kupelo confirmed that Qusheka had secured a three-year tender - worth R8.3-million a year - for cleaning the Mthatha Hospital Complex.

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