

***"Wait for the Lord; be strong,
and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!"***
~ Psalm 27:14 ESV

DR CONGO: Fatal Church Bombing

Sources: Morning Star News, UN Peacekeeping, VOA, Disciples of Christ, Nation Media

On January 15th, a joint baptismal service was held in the town of Kasindi, which is located in eastern DR Congo. During the service, two men apparently entered the building and left a bag containing explosives before vacating the church premises. The resulting explosion killed at least 14 people and injured dozens of others. As the local hospital was quickly filled with wounded church members, some of the victims had to be transported by United Nations helicopters to the provincial capital of Goma.

The self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) terrorist group has claimed responsibility for the attack, which is believed to have been perpetuated by the ADF, a rebel group with affiliations to IS. While violence from rebel groups has caused havoc in eastern DR Congo for years, this latest attack directly targeted Christians as they were praying. One church elder believes it was done to threaten and instill fear among members of the Christian community. A Kenyan national, who was allegedly involved in planning the attack, has been arrested.



The aftermath of the bombing.
Photo: Morning Star News

In response to the incident, the Church of Christ in Congo has called for a time of national mourning. They further urged all believers living in this African nation to be extra vigilant in places of worship. For other reports on persecution of Christians in this war-torn nation, go to this [list of reports](#).

Pray that God's peace will calm the anxious minds and hearts of all who have been affected by this horrific event. Additionally, please pray for the physical and emotional healing of our brothers and sisters in Christ who sustained injuries during the attack. May the Holy Spirit also minister greatly needed comfort to all who are mourning the loss of loved ones. Ask the Lord to guide the efforts of the country's governing forces and other organizations that are diligently working to bring peace to this troubled region, resulting in positive changes taking place in the lives of the perpetrators as well.

NIGERIA: Pastor Shot and Worshippers Abducted

Sources: Peoples Gazette, TheCable.ng, Morning Star News, BBC

Armed militants invaded the village of Dantsauri in Katsina State, northern Nigeria, on January 15th. During the raid, Pastor Haruna, who serves as the leader of the local New Life for All Church, was shot and injured. As many as 25 Christians were then kidnapped but, according to subsequent news reports, most of them were able to escape.

At last report, police confirmed that five women are still being held captive by the militants. These women, who range in age from 13 to 49, were captured while they were on their way to the Sunday church service. One report suggests that two young children may have been with the women during the abduction.

While police were called to the village, by the time they arrived, the attackers had already escaped with their victims. The authorities are continuing to search for those responsible. At the time of publishing this *Persecution & Prayer Alert* report, there has been no contact with the kidnappers.



Photo: Voice of America

Over the years, many innocent civilians residing within the nation of Nigeria have been subjected to extreme violence from armed insurgents. In many cases, Christians were specifically targeted by fellow Nigerians who adhere to militant Islamic viewpoints. In the 2023

World Watch List, which was recently released by Open Doors, it is noted that violence against Christians is more extreme in Nigeria than anywhere else in the world.

Out of the 5,623 Christians documented to have been killed for their faith worldwide in 2022, 5,014 of these slayings took place in Nigeria. For more reports addressing the violence perpetrated against Nigeria's Christians, go to our [country report](#).

In the aftermath of this recent attack, please pray that the Lord will administer divine healing and strength to Pastor Haruna, resulting in the full recovery of this faithful church leader. Also prayerfully remember the group of kidnapped Christian women and children remaining in captivity. May each one of these abducted victims experience God's protection – as well as greatly needed comfort, hope and courage – while awaiting release or rescue from their captors. Furthermore, please pray on behalf of the victims' concerned families, joining in their heartfelt intercessory pleas for the hopeful safe return of their abducted loved ones.

ERITREA: 44 Christians Arrested; Three Others Released

Sources: Church in Chains, Release International, UCA News, Christian Solidarity Worldwide

According to a recent report, 44 believers have been arrested from private homes in Eritrea by governing officials since the beginning of 2023. The group – consisting of 39 women and five men – are being held at the Mai Serwa prison on the outskirts of the Eritrean capital of Asmara. No further details are available at this time.

In a separate case relating to three other Christian prisoners, diplomatic action from the Vatican likely played a part in their release. In mid-October, three Catholic clerics – Mihretab Stefanos, Abba Abraham Habtom Gebremariam and Bishop Abune Fikremariam Hagos – were detained, despite belonging to one of the few faith communities approved by the Eritrean government. (See [this page](#) for more details on their arrests.)

Father Gebremariam was released on November 23rd. The other two men were discharged on December 28th. News of their release came after videos emerged of the bishop being greeted at the Catholic cathedral in Asmara. While addressing the clerics' situation, Elizabeth Chyrum from Human Rights Concern Eritrea stated: "The arrest and subsequent release of the Catholic clergy provide a clear illustration, if one is needed, that permitted religious communities also experience repression. While [we] welcome these releases, we also recall that thousands of prisoners of conscience remain detained without charge or trial...."



A cathedral in Asmara.
Photo: Wikipedia / KH ([cc](#))

While we thank God for the release of the three mentioned church leaders, please be mindful to prayerfully uphold the many Christians remaining imprisoned in Eritrea, including the 44 who were recently arrested. Ask the Lord to especially increase the fortitude and endurance of prisoners facing extremely difficult conditions. May He also work mightily in the hearts and minds of the nation's governing leaders, urging them to recognize and honour the rights of all Eritrean citizens.

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