

"We are happy when we see persecution come in our country. People are thirsty to know more about the faith when they don't see any hope."

~ An Algerian church leader

DR CONGO: Increasing Violence by IS Terrorists

Source: BBC Monitoring

According to an analysis conducted by *BBC Monitoring*, the self-declared terrorist group, Islamic State (IS), and its affiliated members have significantly escalated a campaign of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. During the first half of 2023, the terrorists claimed to have instigated 58 violent attacks in the DR Congo, targeting those whom they identify as Christians. These attacks are concentrated in the eastern provinces of North Kivu and Ituri.

This influx of violence took place despite the fact that the number of attacks in the southeastern African country of Mozambique has dropped significantly since the previous year. Statistics indicate that, in 2022, Mozambique bore the brunt of the aggression perpetrated by IS; however, the jihadist group has lost considerable influence in that country during recent months.

The terrorist group's recently published propaganda boasts that its militants have plundered Christian villages and massacred local residents of these targeted communities. The group justifies their attacks by claiming that the Quran dictates that Christians must either pay a tax (*Jizya*), convert to Islam, or face death. There is no indication that the first two options were offered to any of the Christians affected by the recent attacks.

The DR Congo is considered predominantly Christian, with Muslims making up a little more than one percent of the population. Therefore, any time the militant Islamic group launches an attack in the country, its members could assumedly imply that it was perpetrated against "Christians." Nevertheless, IS fighters have been clearly targeting Christians in their efforts to establish an Islamic nation within central Africa. In their weekly newsletter, *al-Naba*, they claim the attacks are "avenging Muslims killed or imprisoned by Christian armies." Yet, since the group's ability to attack armed forces has been diminished, the recently occurring violence has mainly been inflicted on civilians.

Prayerfully ask the Lord to minister His peace and comfort to the many innocent people who have been affected by these escalated attacks. Pray that the governing authorities of this Central African nation will receive the wisdom and resources needed to put a stop to this violence and prevent it from reoccurring. Please also intercede on behalf of those responsible for the attacks. May they be convicted of their horrific crimes against humanity and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, also be brought to a point of repentance and salvation.



IS celebrated killing "over 100 Christians" in March.
Photo: al-Naba

REPORT UPDATES

VIETNAM: Imprisoned Pastor Faces Health Issues

Sources: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Radio Free Asia

Vietnamese pastor Nguyen Trung Ton was imprisoned in 2011 on charges of "anti-state propaganda." He was rearrested in 2017 and convicted in April 2018 for "carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the government." The Christian leader was sentenced to 12 years in prison. (To review previously published information on the pastor's sentencing, go to [this page](#).)

According to a report from *Radio Free Asia*, Pastor Nguyen has been suffering from a persistent cough following COVID-19 but was denied any medical treatment. He also has an eye condition resulting in almost total loss of his vision. The pastor's wife, Nguyen Thi Lanh, has expressed concern for her husband's life due to the poor prison conditions.

The inhumane treatment and lack of medical care in prisons throughout Vietnam are believed to have contributed to the deaths of several political prisoners in recent years, including Lutheran pastor Dinh Diem in January 2023.



Pastor Nguyen Trung Ton
Photo: Viet Tan Facebook page

Please pray for great improvement to take place regarding Pastor Nguyen's overall well-being, asking the Lord to grant him physical healing, as well as needed spiritual strength and encouragement. May the authorities be moved to release this long-suffering church leader, along with other believers who have been imprisoned in Vietnam because of their Christian faith and defence of human rights. Also ask the Lord to minister to Pastor Nguyen's wife as she deals with this difficult time of separation, and the resulting inability to care for her husband during his time of need.

ALGERIA: Christian Convert Receives Presidential Pardon

Source: Middle East Concern

Algerian Christians are rejoicing over the release of Hamid Soudad, a Christian convert who was sentenced in March 2021 to five years in prison for blasphemy ([read more](#)). Hamid was among the 8,500-plus prisoners who were released or had their sentences decreased as part of the Algerian Independence Day celebrations on July 5th.

Married with four young children, Hamid has been a believer since 2001. In 2018, he shared a caricature of the Islamic prophet Muhammad on social media, which resulted in his arrest. For more about the persecution of Christians in Algeria, go to our [country report](#).

Praise God that this believer has been pardoned and, as a result, is now happily reunited with his young family! Pray that Hamid will fully recover from the ordeal, so he can transition well to life beyond the confinement of prison walls. Throughout the process, may the Lord minister in wonderful ways to Hamid and his family, providing them great peace, healing from the trauma of his imprisonment, and guidance as they anticipate a brighter future. Continue to prayerfully uphold this North African nation, praying that our Algerian Christian brothers and sisters will be granted freedom to worship God and share their faith without the threat of charges or imprisonment.



ERITREA: Pastors Endured 7,000 Days in Prison

Sources: Mission Network News, Church in Chains

In 2002, the government of Eritrea passed legislation that locked down religious freedom in the country, outlawing every religion except Sunni Islam, Eritrean Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism. Since that time, hundreds of believers have been detained without charge and often held for many years without trial.

Before his arrest, Pastor Haile Naizgi* was the chair of the Full Gospel Church of Eritrea – a network comprised of approximately 150 house church groups. These church groups were forcibly closed by a governmental decree but given an application form for official registration. Although the mandated forms were completed and submitted, the representing church leaders received no further contact from the government – until Pastor Haile's arrest in May 2004. He has remained in prison under deplorable conditions ever since.

Another church leader, Dr. Kiflu Gebremeskel, served as the chair of the Eritrean Evangelical Alliance and a member of the executive committee of the Full Gospel Church when he was arrested during an early morning raid on May 23rd, 2004. For more details on the initial arrests of these two church leaders, go to [this page](#).



Pastor Haile Naizgi and Dr. Kiflu Gebremeskel

This past weekend marked a heartbreaking milestone, as these two Christian men passed their 7,000th day in prison. Reflecting on this solemn anniversary, Todd Neddleton from VOM USA stated: "[That equates to] one thousand weeks away from their families. Children that were very young when their fathers were arrested are now college graduates and even parents themselves. How many family milestones have these two Christians missed over the past 7,000 days? As a father and a grandfather, I weep at the thought of all the significant moments they have sacrificed for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom."

Greg Musselman, host of the video podcast, *Closer to the Fire*, recently interviewed Dr. Berhane Asmelash from Release Eritrea about the difficult situation facing these Christian leaders, as well as the estimated 400 other believers who remain detained in Eritrea without trial or legal representation. To view this informative podcast, and learn more about persecution in Eritrea, go to VOMCanada.com/video/ReleaseEritrea1.

Prayerfully uphold Pastor Haile and Dr. Kiflu as they endure this lengthy time of captivity, asking that these faithful believers will receive greatly needed encouragement, strength and hope. Please also pray for God's sustaining grace over the lives their wives, children and grandchildren. May the governing political leaders of countries around the world take a stand against such human rights abuses, petitioning Eritrean governmental officials to allow freedom of conscience and religion, as well as the safe release of all who are presently being arbitrarily detained.

**Note: Pastor Haile Naizgi's translated surname has also been spelled "Naizghi" or "Nayzgi" in previously published reports by various news sources. VOMC's contacts have recently confirmed with the pastor's family that the preferred English spelling of their surname is "Naizgi."*