



THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS  
DIE STEM VAN DIE MARTELARE

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*Africa*

## In the Lion's Den

JOURNEY TO  
THE DRC

GOD'S WORK  
AT MIDNIGHT



"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." Heb 13:3





## The Continuing Story of Islamist Violence

Coverage of the violent spread of Islam has varied widely in the news media, leading some to believe it has subsided. It has not. Constant, comprehensive reporting kept the rise and decline of the self-proclaimed “Islamic State” in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) at the forefront of international news in the years following the 2014 fall of Mosul in northern Iraq. But in sharp contrast, the violent spread of Islam across much of the African continent in the last five years — and continuing today — has received little attention.

**As Christians, we cannot count on the news media or other secular sources to inform us in ways that help us love and serve our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters. As fellow members of the body of Christ, we must share their stories and carry their message ourselves!** Let us resolve to be the voice of our suffering Christian family members in Africa. May they never bear the full weight of their suffering alone.

Islamists in Africa today are simply continuing the story of Islam’s expansion through violent conquest that began with Muhammad 1,400 years ago. Nearly all of today’s Muslim-majority nations in North Africa, the Middle East, and Central and Southeast Asia became Muslim, not by a change of heart, but through the threat of losing their life. Today, people following Islam’s historical agenda of establishing a global caliphate (Islamic theocracy) are using the same barbaric methods used by their founder and early leaders. They have made significant advancements in much of the African continent in recent years, displacing hundreds of thousands of Christian families while the rest of the world barely takes notice.

We must wholeheartedly and unreservedly love Muslims, and that is why we must tell them the truth. The core teachings of Islam — not just the parts that precipitate violence — are false. Islam’s founding prophet, Muhammad, and its primary sacred text, the Quran, are wrong about our Lord

and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is not merely a prophet. He is *“THE Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Matthew 16:16). He is Emmanuel, *“God with us”* (Matthew 1:23). We must cry out to Muslims, including those who persecute us, *“Come, taste and see that the Lord is good! Come and drink of the Living Water.”* John 14:6 - KJV *“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”*

The contrast is clear: Muslim extremists in Africa are willing to kill Christians to advance their ideology, while our African Christian brothers and sisters are willing to die to bring them the love and truth of Christ. We must stand with them now, in their time of great need.

**About the cover:** Islamists abducted this Christian leader in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and threw him into a pit with other Believers from his village.





# Journey to the DRC

Facing ongoing attacks from Islamists trying to eradicate Christians from the region, Believers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ask for prayer from the global body of Christ.

**A**s Front-Line Workers travelled across the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) for a first-time meeting with persecuted Christians, their small plane flew over several volcanoes, the Rwenzori Mountains, the vast Ituri Forest and three different armed conflicts. The pilot pointed out the window to indicate where the various rebel groups were active — areas they would want to avoid if an emergency landing became necessary.

More than 91% of Congolese identify as Christians, including 19% evangelical, but the country is also home to more than 100 active armed groups, according to the U.N. While many of the armed groups are motivated by tribal, ethnic or political concerns, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) has specifically targeted Christians. Having originally formed in the mid-1990s to wage an insurgency against the Ugandan government, the ADF's defeat there prompted a shift

in focus to the eastern DRC, where the group now seeks to eradicate Christianity and establish an Islamist caliphate. And after the ADF allied itself with the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS) in 2018, its attacks against Christians intensified.

## Oicha

When the Christian workers landed near the edge of the Ituri Forest, they drove north to the town of Oicha, where ADF attacks against Christians are not uncommon. A group of 12 pastors had gathered to tell the Front-Line Workers about the violent persecution that Christians in the area are experiencing at the hands of Islamists.

One pastor had witnessed the murder of another pastor at the entrance to his church. And another pastor reported that only 11 churches remain of the 54 in his denomination that existed in the area prior to the conflict; he said many of the church buildings were completely

destroyed. Similarly, a pastor from a different denomination said their churches had been reduced from 25 a few years ago to just eight today, and six pastors from those churches had been killed.

"The ADF is saying that if we want the war to end, everyone should become Muslim," one of the pastors said. "If you want the killings to stop, everyone should confess Islam."

The Front-Line Workers also met with several Christians who had been abducted by the ADF, including a Christian woman named Grace who was forced to witness horrific acts of violence against her family. Grace and her sister-in-law were returning home from fetching water when they saw members of the ADF approaching. The women screamed, dropped their jerry cans filled with water and ran. But Grace fell, and the ADF caught her.

As they beat her with the butt of their

guns, she pleaded for mercy. "Please don't kill me," she said. "I have a baby." The gunmen then told her to take them to her child.

Grace led them to her home, where eight relatives, including her infant daughter, were staying. When the rebels ordered everyone out of the house, Grace, who was weak from the beatings, struggled to carry her baby.

Once outside, the Islamists tied up seven of Grace's relatives and beheaded them with machetes. In a further act of barbarity, they put her family members' severed heads in boiling water before setting the house on fire and leaving with Grace and her child.

Grace was held captive for several days and moved from one ADF camp to another, where she witnessed more atrocities. Eventually, the Islamists released all of the women with babies, and Grace returned to her mother's house after days of wandering through the bush.

"Grace had been released just a week before we met her," a Front-Line Worker said. "Her story was similar to many others we heard. Others who had been

**"The ADF is saying that if we want the war to end, everyone should become Muslim."**

abducted shared about people being asked if they were Christians while at the rebel camps. Those who confessed Christ were most often killed."

A Christian man named Jean-Louis said that after he was abducted by the ADF, a rebel unashamedly boasted about their plan of action. "We know we are killing Christians," the Islamist said. "We won't stop until everyone is a Muslim or dead."

Thousands of Christians like Grace and Jean-Louis have been displaced from their homes in Oicha, and many are now living in temporary shelters. Believers who rely on farming for their food and income must make the difficult choice between remaining in town or returning to their farms, where they are more likely to be abused, abducted or killed. Attacks occasionally occur even in town, so the displaced Christians in Oicha know the

ADF could attack again at any time.

After several days in Oicha, the Front-Line Workers took a short flight north to the village of Boga, located within an area locally referred to as the "death triangle" because of its history of violent ADF activity.

### Boga

As the Christian workers approached the village, the pilot was hesitant to land in Boga. The airstrip had not been used for more than a year and had only recently been made more secure by the Ugandan military. But with the Ugandan commander's approval, the pilot began the first of three flyovers to ensure that the dirt runway was clear for landing.

Once on the ground, the workers drove to a church in the centre of town to meet a small group of pastors and community leaders. Within 20 minutes, however, more than 100 people had gathered at the church to share their stories with the visiting Christians. Due to security concerns, the Front-Line Workers were limited to two hours on the ground.

As in Oicha, most church buildings in Boga have been destroyed. Many residents fled the village when the ADF attacks began and had just begun returning three months prior to the Front-Line Workers' visit.

"Boga ran into many troubles," a local pastor said. "There are no churches; all of them have been closed. Many people were killed by the rebels, and others were taken. Today we still don't know where they are. Others have gone to Uganda, and some are still running."



◀ After burning her home and murdering many of her relatives, Islamists abducted Grace and her baby. Front-Line Workers met with her just one week after her release.



One Christian taken by the ADF, a man named Matendo, was working in his field in 2021 when rebels abducted him and six others. When the rebels questioned Matendo and the others, they told their abductors that they were Christians who serve in the church.

"Do you know what our purpose is?" one of the Islamists asked. "Our purpose is that everyone becomes Muslim. If you don't agree, you will lose your life."

True to their word, the rebels killed one of the Christians, a man named Sayid, and threw the others into a deep hole. Matendo eventually managed to escape, but he recalls few details because of a head injury he suffered in the attack.

When the visiting Front-Line Workers asked those who had gathered at the church how many of them had lost family members in ADF attacks since 2019, nearly everyone raised their hands.

### A People of Prayer

Christians in the DRC have remained faithful in prayer while suffering recurring Islamist attacks. One woman who was abducted took the opportunity to share the Gospel with a rebel who had noticed her praying.

"He got really upset and asked what I was doing," the woman said. "I said, 'I am praying peace for you.' After that, God saved me." Her captors released her and her children a few days later.

Matendo also relied on the power of prayer as the Islamists demanded that he renounce his Christian faith. "The ADF told us they didn't want to hear about Christians," he said. "They wanted all the Christians to turn and become Muslims. It was good for us to continue praying so that we as Christians could continue to have peace. So God helped us. I am here because of the help He has given to me."

Although the Believers in Oicha and Boga have experienced great suffering, they repeatedly asked Front-Line Workers for one thing — prayer. "We are very thankful that you have come," a Christian in Boga said. "We have suffered a lot. We see you are a people of prayer. Pray more."

And a pastor in Oicha emphasized the same need. "What we need from you is prayer," he said. "Pray for us. My hope as a pastor is that these killings do not affect the faith of my church members. When you go back home, please don't forget to pray for us." ■



▲ A pastor sits amid the rubble of his church building, which Islamists burned to the ground while church members were inside.



◀ Nearly everyone who met with Front-Line Workers at a church in Boga said they had lost family members in ADF attacks in the past several years.

# In the Lion's Den



**W**hen a group of pastors met with Front-Line Workers in Pemba, Mozambique, their grief was palpable as they recalled the suffering they had experienced at the hands of Islamic insurgents.

While Mozambique is a majority-Christian country, the northern provinces are predominantly Muslim. And one of these provinces, Cabo Delgado, has endured a violent insurgency that began in 2016 and intensified in 2019 after the insurgents pledged allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS). The Islamists attacked villages and overran entire towns, including the homes of the pastors who met with Front-Line Workers in Pemba. Over time, the Islamists gained control over most of Cabo Delgado.

The insurgents are part of a group called *al-Sunnah wa Jama*, which translates roughly as “adherents of the prophetic tradition.” Local residents and officials commonly refer to the group as *al-Shabab*, meaning “the youth,” because many of the attackers are young; they have no known connection to the terrorist group of the same name in Somalia.

While many Muslim residents have been affected by the violence in Cabo Delgado, the extremists have specifically

targeted Christians. One pastor said they gathered everyone in the middle of his village and asked them about their religious beliefs. The Islamists decapitated those who said they were Christians and then burned every home and church in the village.

A pastor from Mocimboa da Praia recalled how the Islamists had surrounded the city, trapping everyone inside, and then begun killing indiscriminately. Those who tried to flee by car were burned alive in their vehicles. “We felt like chickens going into a lion’s den,” the pastor said. “I saw mountains of dead bodies everywhere.”

One of the pastors was separated from his family during an Islamist attack, and he hasn’t seen his two children, ages 4 and 7, since; he doesn’t know if they survived the attack. When he returned to the village to look for his children, he saw many decapitated and dismembered bodies. His church building had been destroyed.

As each pastor told stories of suffering from his church and village, the other pastors at the table bowed their heads and began to pray. Then, one of the pastors began to sing. As the others joined in, their time of shared sorrow

was transformed into a time of worship, reflecting the pastors’ hope in Christ.

Amid their suffering, the pastors have seen God at work. “Because of all that’s happened,” one of the pastors said, “the people fled here to one place, where they can hear the Word of God. When we go back, we will see many, many, many new churches being planted. So many Muslims are saying, ‘We want to follow Jesus because only Christians have brought love.’”

Another pastor said, “The sharing of the Gospel just doesn’t have any difficulty now. When people do evil, it actually helps us remember we are different. God has called us to be different, and it is an opportunity to set ourselves apart.”

As they finished their time together, a Front-Line Worker asked the pastors one last question: “Do you think more people will go to heaven as a result of these attacks?”

The pastors responded unanimously with a resounding “Yes!” ■

▲ Christian leaders continue to gather their congregations for worship as they see God at work amid a violent Islamic insurgency across northern Mozambique.



# WE MUST DO GOD'S WORK AT MIDNIGHT

BY RICHARD WURMBRAND

Matthew 25:6 - KJV

"And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him."



**T**he earth turns on its axis. Midnight is the moment when a part of the earth is the farthest away from the sun. Spiritual midnight is the period of the greatest departure of men from God. We are approaching this midnight.

The children of God do not receive midnight with the same feelings as the world. At midnight, the firstborn of the Egyptians died, but the chosen people got their freedom.

The Lord has said, *"Night is coming, when no one can work"* (John 9:4). But as often as a thing is declared impossible in the Bible, this does not refer to the faithful. About them, Jesus declared, *"All things are possible for one who believes"* (Mark 9:23).

God's people can work near midnight. It was at midnight that Samson took the gates of the city of Gaza (Judges 16:3). At midnight, Ruth received from Boaz the promise, *"I will do for you all that you ask"* (Ruth 3:8–11). At midnight, Paul and Silas won for the Lord the jailer of Philippi (Acts 16:25).

At midnight, God's people have achieved great works. Therefore, the psalmist says, *"At midnight I rise to praise you"* (Psalm 119:62).

We are not afraid of the darkness in the world. We work. The bridegroom comes soon. We cannot meet him empty-handed.

We met with a member of the underground church from the Soviet Union who told us about secret meetings with an attendance of 100 to 200 people. A traitor had informed Communist police of a secret baptism. The pastor was already in the river when police arrived. Seeing the Communists, the pastor ordered those awaiting baptism to quickly get into the water. Then the pastor told the police, "We will come out only after they are baptized." The newly baptized Christians were arrested, and the pastor was sentenced to five years in prison.

The brother we met with helped establish underground

printing presses, which produced New Testaments. When asked how he gets the paper, ink and glycerine for printing, as buying great quantities would surely attract attention, he replied, "There are brethren who work in papermills and in chemical factories. The Communists have stolen everything from everybody. It is the people's property. We represent the people. We take back what has been stolen from us."

Communists broke the ribs of a general who placed his faith in Jesus Christ. He now goes from village to village witnessing for Christ. Arrests are useless because jailed Christians convert their fellow prisoners and baptize them in jail.

The miraculous story of the Acts of the Apostles continues.

We don't care that midnight is approaching. Only ordinary men cannot work during a spiritual night, but "All things are possible for one who believes." He can work even when he personally passes through the dark night of the soul, even when he is on his death bed.

It is near midnight. Darkness confuses. We have to meet the bridegroom. We still have time to work. ■

*Richard Wurmbbrand (1909 – 2001) was imprisoned in Communist Romania for his faith in Christ. Following his imprisonment, he and his wife, Sabina (1913 – 2000), sought ways to serve persecuted Christians and in 1967 started a global ministry known today as The Voice of the Martyrs. You can read Richard's story in Wurmbbrand: Tortured for Christ — The Complete Story, available from our offices in Johannesburg for R200 (Excluding Postage). Email Bianca at [bianca@vomsa.org](mailto:bianca@vomsa.org) for more information.*

# Prayer Diary<sup>®</sup>

February/March 2023

## FEBRUARY

S 19	KAZAKHSTAN	Pray that Christians disowned by their families will be welcomed by fellow Believers.
M 20	MALDIVES	Pray that God will strengthen every new Believer and establish a network of supportive Christians.
T 21	IRAN	Pray that Bible smugglers will successfully distribute God's Word without detection.
W 22	SUDAN	Pray that evangelists who receive motorbikes will be able to reach more people with the Gospel.
T 23	KUWAIT	Pray that more Kuwaitis will have safe online access to the Bible.
F 24	LAOS	Pray that God will provide for those expelled from their homes because of their Christian faith.
S 25	KYRGYZSTAN	Pray that Christians refused the right to bury loved ones in a cemetery will hope in Christ.
S 26	SAUDI ARABIA	Pray for Believers who are discipling others and being disciplined as they grow in faith.
M 27	SRI LANKA	Pray that Christian families will have access to burial grounds to bury their deceased loved ones.
T 28	SOMALIA	Pray for Believers who are mourning the recent deaths of Christian leaders.

## MARCH

W 1	KENYA	Pray that Christians will demonstrate love for their Muslim neighbours.
T 2	VIETNAM	Pray for the development of a new generation of pastors to lead the church.
F 3	LIBYA	Pray for the bold witness of sub-Saharan African Believers who live and work in the country.
S 4	DJIBOUTI	Pray for the courage of a Christian convert from Islam who is being targeted for his faith.
S 5	TAJIKISTAN	Pray that Christians will find ways to gather, as churches are tightly regulated.
M 6	MOZAMBIQUE	Pray for the reestablishment of a Christian school destroyed by Islamists.
T 7	AFGHANISTAN	Pray for ministries sharing the truth of Christ through social media.
W 8	EGYPT	Pray that children who receive Christmas Care Packs will feel loved by the body of Christ.
T 9	QATAR	Pray that new Christians will treasure God's Word.
F 10	NIGER	Pray for effective Bible distributions among the Tuareg people.
S 11	BANGLADESH	Pray that those who cannot read will receive their own audio Bible.
S 12	KAZAKHSTAN	Pray that Believers in remote villages will receive their own copy of God's Word this year.
M 13	TANZANIA	Pray for the availability of Bibles in remote, predominantly Muslim areas.
T 14	BAHRAIN	Pray that ministry leaders will have opportunities to reach people throughout the region.
W 15	COLOMBIA	Pray for the widows and families of pastors who have been killed by guerrilla groups.
T 16	UZBEKISTAN	Pray for the accessibility of Bibles, which can be difficult to obtain and risky to own.
F 17	JORDAN	Pray that Muslims who persecute Christian family members will be drawn to the love of Christ.
S 18	SRI LANKA	Pray for the perseverance of Christians who are rejected by their communities.

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