



THE

VOICE

OF THE MARTYRS

SPECIAL REPORT

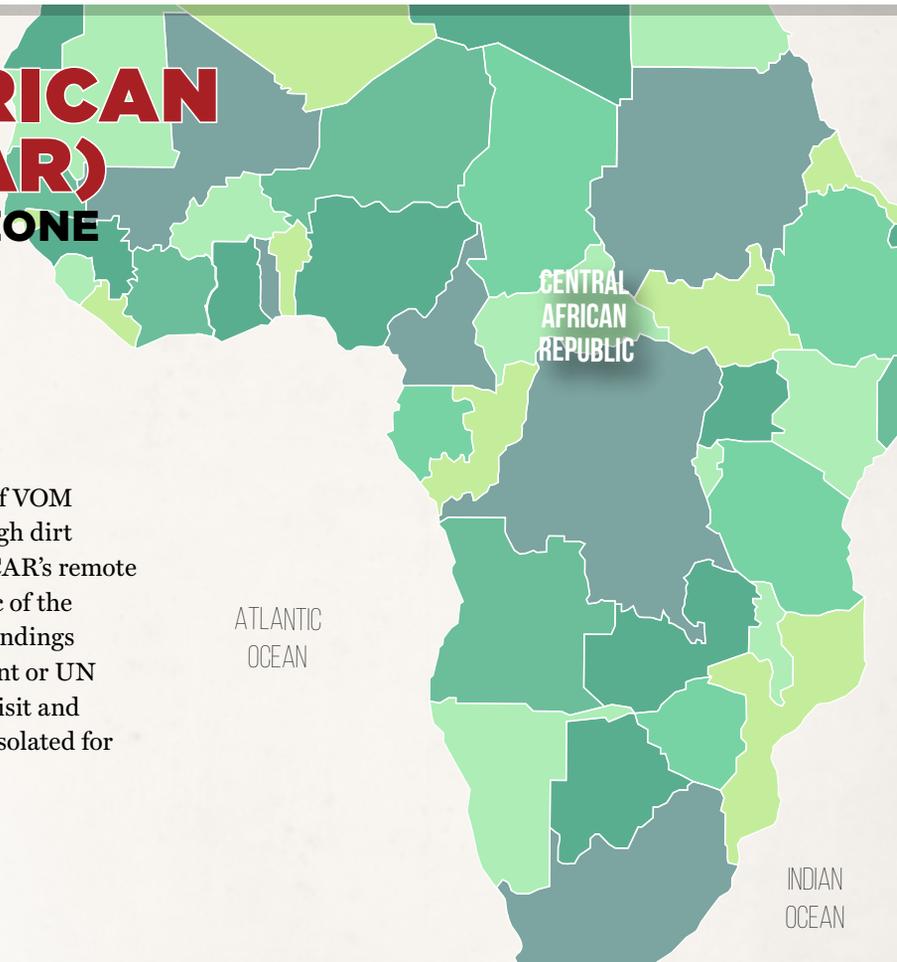


Pastors and church leaders in the CAR receive boxes of Bibles provided by VOM in French and Sango, one of many local languages. "In my church, the majority don't have a Bible," said one pastor. "They will be very, very joyful to have the Bible, the Word of God." *Left lower inset: Planes must land on unpaved runways to reach remote areas of the CAR to deliver Bibles and aid to persecuted Christians.*

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR) FELLOWSHIP IN A WAR ZONE

In the Central African Republic (CAR), ongoing attacks by Islamist rebels create significant security and logistical challenges in bringing help and encouragement to persecuted Christians.

A 12-seat Cessna 208 transporting a team of VOM workers came to rest at the end of the rough dirt runway in Zemio, a small town near the CAR's remote southeastern border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). It was the first stop of 16 different landings on mostly unpaved runways guarded by government or UN soldiers. The team was in the country recently to visit and minister to persecuted Christians who have been isolated for years in a country raging with internal conflicts.



CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

ATLANTIC OCEAN

INDIAN OCEAN

“We were threatened by the rebels, and they just started to shoot.
We have nothing left in Zemio.”

The Africa Inland Mission (AIM) bush plane rumbled to a stop just a few miles from the site where a large AIM mission base had been attacked. For decades the mission base had served the region until Good Friday 2017, when Islamist rebels destroyed it along with numerous homes and local businesses.

During the Good Friday violence and subsequent attacks, Islamists murdered more than 500 residents in the mostly Christian area. An estimated 45,000 people fled the massacre and formed a refugee camp across the nearby M'Bomou River in the DRC.

In the immediate aftermath, VOM provided emergency aid to survivors, including tarps for temporary shelters, life-saving food and basic survival essentials, such as cooking implements, bedding and hygiene items. Since then, VOM has visited the survivors to help with ongoing

physical and spiritual needs.

A country nearly the size of Texas with a population of 5.4 million people, of which 70% claim to be Christian, CAR has been racked by Islamist insurgencies and militia battles since 2012, when various Islamist factions united as a group called the Seleka. The group managed to temporarily seize the capital, Bangui, murdering thousands of the city's mostly Christian residents. A counterinsurgency of non-Muslims, the Anti-balaka, fought back. Both groups committed violence against Christians.

Over 450,000 Central Africans are currently displaced, and thousands have been killed. Government and UN forces recaptured the capital and maintain a security presence in towns like Zemio, but Christians are still regularly targeted.

SPIRITUAL ENCOURAGEMENT FOR A SCATTERED FLOCK

The VOM team flew from Zemio to Rafai, where they delivered Bibles and checked on developments at a Bible school. Local Christians had requested help after the Islamists had destroyed the Bible school in Zemio.

After the 2017 Zemio attacks, Theo Banda had fled to Rafai with his wife, as well as his daughter, her husband, Henri, and their seven children.

“We were threatened by the rebels, and they just started to shoot,” Theo said. “The house is completely destroyed. We have nothing left in Zemio.”

Henri said the attackers murdered his father and one of his aunts. After the family fled to Rafai, local Christians helped provide them with food and other necessities.

“We experienced a lot of pain and challenges,” Henri said. “The church in Rafai ... received us and helped us and fed us.”

Since access to Bibles is limited in the CAR, the family had not been able to replace the ones they'd been

Attacks by Islamist insurgent groups have forced thousands of citizens in the CAR to flee their homes. VOM has regularly provided emergency assistance to displaced Christians.

The CAR has been racked by Islamist insurgencies and militia battles since 2012. Government and UN forces have tried to bring stability to conflict areas, but Christians continue to suffer greatly.



forced to leave behind when they fled. Receiving new copies of God's Word was an encouragement as they continue to rebuild their lives in Rafai.

"We are very happy to have our Bible with us today," Theo said.

Henri agreed. "It is God's goodness that we have received, and we are really grateful for that."

"You are not alone in what you are suffering."

While some displaced Christians, like Theo's family, are rebuilding their lives in a new location, others recently returned to Zemio. The VOM team asked several pastors why, and one said his church members were ready to start over after enduring years in the refugee camp with few resources other than their faith in Christ.

"They kept in unity by having prayer meetings or meeting the church under a mango tree," he said. "They have kept their faith and been united as a people."

To help these people resettle, VOM workers delivered supplies and metal sheeting to rebuild the roofs of five churches, several destroyed schools and rural health clinics.

But Russian mercenaries have since moved into Zemio, and residents who recently returned have had to flee again.

COMFORT CARRIED ON AIRCRAFT WINGS

The VOM team also flew to Bocaranga, on the other side of the CAR, where Islamist rebel

groups have regularly assaulted and killed Christians.

With armed government soldiers nearby for protection, the team visited a Christian school with 312 students, including 57 orphans and 113 children from recently displaced families. Team members also met and prayed with several other Christians who had endured Islamist attacks and whose loved ones had been killed.

Before leaving Bocaranga, a Front-Line Worker spoke to an overflowing crowd inside a newly constructed church building. "We carry one another's burdens," he said. "You are not alone in what you are suffering. There are millions of Christians who worship Jesus around the world, the global church, the global body of Christ, who not



When Theo Banda (not pictured) fled to Rafai with his wife (*right inset above*), as well as his daughter and son-in-law (*left inset above*), he left everything behind, including the family's Bibles. Local Christians provided for their immediate needs, and VOM replaced their Bibles, which they joyfully received.

only care for you, but are praying for you."

After the service, the VOM team flew to several additional cities and are already planning to return. Their commitment to helping members of Christ's body in the CAR remains firm, as does the resilient Central African Christians' devotion to Christ.

"Somehow the church survives," said a team member who has served in the region for years. "But prayer is needed for the Christians in that land."

Singing in the Presence of Their Enemies

I had the privilege of visiting the town of Zemio in the Central African Republic (CAR) to meet with Christians who had lost everything because of their faith. After our plane landed on the dirt runway, we were transported by motorcycle to the distribution site where our displaced brothers and sisters could receive relief items.

A group of local pastors informed us that the Christians there live among people who joined Islamists in recent attacks against churches and Christian villages. The Islamist attackers live just across the river from where we were meeting. As I began to imagine what it would feel like to walk through a market and pass by a man who had attacked my home or children, a sound interrupted my thoughts — women were singing under a grove of trees nearby. Their voices grew louder as more women arrived. Some 100 sisters had gathered to sing praises to God!

Those who had assaulted our brothers and sisters were nearby, and armed attackers were just across the river. They were literally singing praise in the presence of their enemies! My faith was challenged by such boldness. Inspired by their example, I prayed quietly for the Lord to strengthen my faith.

In almost 10 years of ministry with VOM, I have learned that meeting with persecuted Christians in person encourages them more than any words we can share. Hebrews 10:24–25 reminds us how important it is to gather together as Believers. When members of Christ’s global body travel long, sometimes dangerous routes to worship in unity and pray for one another, God stirs us up “to love and good works.” When we sit with our persecuted brothers and sisters in the CAR and other dangerous and hard-to-reach areas, the Lord is glorified and we are mutually encouraged, realizing we are members of one beautiful, eternal family!

Please pray for Front-Line Workers who continue to take great risks meeting with Christians who are experiencing great suffering because of their witness. I pray their bold faith challenges and inspires you as well. And may God bless you with a deeper faith as you fellowship with them through prayer!



Aaron Miller

Leader of VOM’s work in hostile areas and restricted nations

GET INVOLVED

■ PRAY

Pray for Christians like Theo, who was forced to flee from his home when Islamists attacked his town. Pray that displaced Christians will experience God’s provision as they rebuild their lives. Pray that they will be a bold witness to Christ in their new location. And pray for their persecutors to repent and place their trust in Christ.

■ HELP CHRISTIANS IN THE CAR

We invite you to encourage and equip our brothers and sisters in the CAR as they face ongoing opposition for their faith in Christ. Your gift will be used to provide basic living necessities, rebuild homes and churches, and help supply and deliver Bibles to replace those destroyed by Islamists.

■ VOM’S GLOBAL MINISTRY

For more than 55 years, The Voice of the Martyrs has served persecuted Christians in the world’s most difficult and dangerous places to follow Christ. Your gift to VOM’s Global Ministry will be used to help Christians in hostile areas and restricted nations and to draw other members of the body of Christ into fellowship with them.