

MEDIA RELEASE BY OPEN DOORS SOUTHERN AFRICA
EMBARGO: NONE

Worshippers slaughtered in killing spree among Christians in the DRC

The ministry organisation Open Doors Southern Africa, which strengthens and supports persecuted Christians, was shocked by the recent massacre in Komanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The attack in Komanda, which is a town in the rural Ituri Province of Eastern DRC, has been one of the deadliest attacks this year on Christians in sub-Saharan Africa.

A total of 49 Christians, including nine children, in the DRC were slaughtered in a machete attack in what an Open Doors spokesperson has described as a “killing spree” early on Sunday morning, 27 July, during a prayer vigil at a Catholic church. In addition, 20 children were kidnapped. Nearby businesses, shops and houses were also looted and set on fire.

The victims were ambushed by militants from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an Islamist rebel group affiliated with the Islamic State group. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack through a message posted on its Telegram channel.

United Nations (UN) sources report that several other bodies were discovered in burned-out houses and businesses not far from the church where the vigil was held.

A trail of death

An Open Doors local church partner who rushed to be with survivors shared this report: “Some believers were killed in the church hall. Those who tried to flee were caught at the door and slaughtered in the compound. Others who made it to the road were also caught and killed.”

A survivor, Darios*, told Open Doors partners: “They entered Komanda and burned all my belongings. The clothes I’m wearing were just given to me.”

Survivor Antoinette wept as she said that her grandmother, her caregiver, was killed in the attack. “We are in great sadness,” she said.

Komanda was only one of several places the ADF would terrorise that weekend. In Machongani, they killed four Christians and set a house on fire. In Ngeleza (13km from Komanda), they ambushed two people and their driver, then later killed them with machetes and set their motorcycle on fire.

Emergency aid by Open Doors partners

Open Doors partner groups in the DRC have travelled to Komanda, and are now providing aid, medicine and trauma counselling for survivors of the attack.

The DRC is in position number 35 on Open Doors’ World Watch List of the 50 most dangerous countries for Christians in the world.

The latest news follows a widely reported mass killing in North Kivu in February, when an alleged 70 Christians were beheaded in a church building. However, according to Illia Djadi, Open Doors’ senior researcher for freedom of religious belief in sub-Saharan Africa, the attacks by the ADF have been continuing since then.

He says: “The killings are very strategic. They are attacking defenceless rural farming communities, where there is no security presence. Most of the time, they are using machetes, beheading people, in the dead of night to avoid attracting attention. They are massacring village after village, community after community.”

MEDIA RELEASE BY OPEN DOORS SOUTHERN AFRICA

EMBARGO: NONE

Killing sprees with impunity

The news comes at a time when the world's eyes are on a proposed peace deal between the DRC and neighbouring Rwanda, overseen by President Donald Trump of the United States of America. The civil conflict has left Congolese security forces struggling to control the Rwandan-backed paramilitary group M23, particularly in the capital, Kinshasa.

As a result, says Illia, it has left the vast rural areas undefended, and the ADF free to carry out the killing sprees with impunity.

"There is no attention on the activity of the ADF and the ongoing massacres. This power vacuum has allowed them to continue the slaughter unchecked and often unreported. The ADF has an obvious aim: They want to turn a large part of the DRC into an Islamic caliphate, like the horrific one instigated in Iraq and Syria in 2014 by the Islamic State.

"We need to see a clear willingness and responsibility from the government to protect its citizens. And the international community also needs to wake up to what's happening. The name may be different, but this is the Islamic State at work. About six million people have been killed over 30 years in Eastern DRC, and eight million have been internally displaced. We must use all the means that were used to defeat the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq to defeat them again in Eastern DRC."

Human cost of violence

"The immediate and long-term human cost of the violence must not be allowed to continue in this manner," says Jo Newhouse, representative for Open Doors' work in sub-Saharan Africa. "All human beings have the right to protection, no matter their faith, ethnicity or gender.

"We further call on the international Christian community to remain in prayer over the ongoing insecurity in eastern DRC. Pray for an end to the Islamic radical violence as the government at all levels diligently, impartially and transparently addresses the violence and its effects. Pray for provision for the Church in Eastern DRC as it seeks to bring physical and spiritual assistance to the affected."

Open Doors is a voice for more than 380 million persecuted Christians in more than 70 countries all over the world. The organisation is currently running the Arise Africa campaign, which is a multi-year response to the persistent violence waged against Christians in sub-Saharan Africa. Working with Christian leaders throughout sub-Saharan Africa, the campaign intends to enable the African Church to stand in faith where persecution is most extreme.

Targeted attacks

Vivian van de Perre, deputy chief of the UN peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO (United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), stated: "These targeted attacks against defenceless civilians, particularly in places of worship, are not only appalling but also in violation of all human rights standards and international humanitarian law."

According to the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA), the Christian community in the DRC is living in fear, with believers afraid to gather for prayer or worship. "Hearing about the death of a family member has become normal. In some places, prayer itself can be a death sentence," one member shared.

The AEA, together with the Evangelical Alliance of Congo (an umbrella organisation representing various evangelical churches and denominations in the DRC), urged the global Church not to forget their plight and called for increased prayer, awareness and advocacy. They are appealing for

MEDIA RELEASE BY OPEN DOORS SOUTHERN AFRICA
EMBARGO: NONE

coordinated support from Christian bodies worldwide to address both the humanitarian and security challenges faced by churches and civilians in Eastern Congo.

More information

For any questions or to arrange an interview, please contact Elizabeth Botha, Open Doors' media officer, at elizabethb@od.org, (+27) 83 227 8164 or (+27) 11 888 9341.

Open Doors Southern Africa (ODSA) is part of the Open Doors International ministry, which serves persecuted Christians in over 70 countries across the world by delivering Bibles and Christian literature, visiting persecuted Christians, providing discipleship and training, and speaking out and raising awareness through advocacy.

*Media release issued by Elizabeth Botha
Media officer: Open Doors Southern Africa
Tel: (+27) 83 227 8164 / (+27) 11 888 9341
E-mail: elizabethb@od.org*

Captions for photos:

Photo 1: *Mourners look at the caskets in a mass grave after the brutal attack in Komanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo.*

Photo 2: *Christians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo who received food and emergency aid from Open Doors.*

**Pseudonyms used for security purposes.*