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# ***TROUBLING TRENDS***

**ESCALATING PERSECUTION OF  
CHRISTIANS IN AFRICA**

Linda Burkle, PhD



## Troubling Trends: Escalating Persecution of Christians in Africa

By Linda Burkle, PhD

During the last 30 years, I have made numerous trips throughout Africa. The purpose of these trips was primarily to conduct ministry, train and encourage local pastors and their congregations, and provide some limited humanitarian work. In recent years, I have observed an alarming trend of increased violence and persecution toward Christians, particularly in countries that have a large or majority Christian population, such as Nigeria, Kenya, and Democratic Republic of Congo, countries where I have ministered.

In this three-part series, I will present specific incidents of attacks on Christians that have occurred during [the first quarter of 2025](#). Most of this information was provided to me by my colleague, Pastor Shalom Koronge, of Nairobi, Kenya. Through his networking with colleagues in Kenya and other African nations, he has provided valuable information on the plight of Christians living in these countries and others as well. I am grateful for his “on the ground” observations and reports. Unless otherwise noted, specific 2025 incidents of violence and persecution have been provided by Pastor Koronge during a telephone conference on April 14.

### Part 1: Nigeria

The first African country I visited was Nigeria in 1993. At that time, Muslims controlled the government, although the population was almost evenly split between Christians and Muslims, as it remains today. One of our team members indicated on her visa application that we were a “church” group and, as a result, we were denied visas. Following a couple of trips to the Nigerian Embassy by our team leader, a savvy medical doctor and missionary, we were granted visas as a “tour group” and traveled to Nigeria after a month-long delay. Amazingly, because we were conducting medical clinics in remote jungle villages lacking any medical care, the government advertised that they were sponsoring us, and we had government security everywhere we went. The government took credit and gave us access, even our team leader was featured on a radio program. Through prayer, the Lord reversed the situation and gave us great favor.

We were working primarily in central and southern Nigeria but heard stories of the growing persecution of Christians in the North. I recall during an airplane stop in northern Nigeria, a Christian man boarded and was visibly shaken because he had been harassed by Muslims who wanted to confiscate his Bible. Since that time, persecution, especially violence, has increased exponentially.

In recent years, Nigeria has been considered the most dangerous country for Christians to live in and the most hostile to Christians, particularly in the northern states, which are under Sharia law. In 2022, roughly 5,000 Christians there were murdered for their faith; more than the number killed in all other countries combined. In 2023, an estimated 7,000 Christians were targeted and killed.(1)

“According to estimations in 2020, between 11,000 and 12,000 Christians were killed by Boko Haram, Jihadist Fulani herdsmen, and bandits or highway kidnappers in Nigeria from 2015 to 2020. According to the source, four to five million Christians were displaced and two thousand churches were destroyed in Nigeria.”(2)

Genocide Watch reported that 6,006 Christians were killed from January 2021 to March 2022. Many were hacked to death. During the same period, an estimated 700 were abducted. In 2021 alone, 3,800 were abducted. “From July 2009 (year of the Boko Haram Uprising) to March 2022, the Christian death tolls rose to 45,644. Approximately 30,000 moderate Muslims were also killed during the period by the

country's Jihadists, who are chiefly indigenous Fulani Herdsmen, Fulani Bandits and other jihadist pastoralists or mercenaries.”(3)

“From December 2023 to February 2024, more than 1,300 people were killed in Plateau state alone, including more than 500 women and 260 children. Nearly 30,000 people have been displaced. The frequency and pattern of the attacks have led to growing fears of an orchestrated campaign to forcibly displace Christian communities and seize their ancestral lands.”(4)

Open Doors International, which monitors Christian persecution globally, ranks Nigeria as the seventh worst nation for persecution of Christians on its 2025 World Watch List. Despite the election of Bola Tinubu in 2023 as the new president and hopes of more protection for Christians, the situation has not improved. Tinubu, who is Muslim, created a more balanced and diverse leadership team. However, thus far, his government has been ineffective in stopping the jihadist violence that continues to escalate, with targeted attacks on Christians by Islamist militants, including Fulani fighters, Boko Haram, and ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province).(5)

“While Christians used to be vulnerable only in the Muslim-majority northern states, this violence continues to spread into the Middle Belt and even further south. The attacks are shockingly brutal. Many believers are killed, particularly men, while women are often kidnapped and targeted for sexual violence. More believers are killed for their faith in Nigeria than anywhere else in the world. These militants also destroy homes, churches and livelihoods. More than 16.2 million Christians in sub-Saharan Africa, including high numbers from Nigeria, have been driven from their homes by violence and conflict. Millions now live in displacement camps.”(6)

#### **Persecution Incidents in 2025**

- January 2025 — In the Plateau state, in the Sha village, three Christians were killed in a targeted attack.
- Feb. 20 — Within 24 hours, in Bassa village, there were two attacks killing four Christians.
- March 7 — In Katuna state, Boko Haram killed Sylvester Okechukwu, a Catholic priest.
- March 9 — In the Birnin Dede area in Kebbi state, militants killed 11 Christians.
- March 27 — Suspected Fulani militants killed 11 Christians during a nighttime raid on the Christian farming community of Ruwi B2 village in Bokkos County, Plateau state. “The attack occurred with the Nigerian army and Operation Safe Haven security personnel stationed nearby, prompting community members to call for enhanced communication and operational effectiveness among security agencies to better protect residents. In response, Amnesty International Nigeria condemned the killings and emphasized the need for proactive measures to secure the safety of vulnerable communities.”(7)
- April 2 — In Plateau state, Bokkos area, 52 Christians were killed in a mass attack. The U.S. Embassy issued a statement condemning the attack on the X social media platform.
- April 13 — On Palm Sunday, Islamic Fulani extremists slaughtered at least 54 Christians in the village of Zikke near Jos, Plateau state, in what is considered “a targeted act of genocide against the Christian community.” Those killed included the elderly and children who were butchered in their homes. Eyewitnesses said the Fulani extremist attack lasted more than an hour, leaving 103 households destroyed and the entire village displaced. Frustration mounted as residents reported a delayed military response and accused security forces of bias, disarming local Christian youth but not Fulani attackers.(9)

## International Response

Nigeria has been broadly criticized by human rights groups and the international community alike. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has repeatedly recommended that Nigeria be designated as a “country of particular concern” due to the degree of religious persecution. This designation enables the U.S. Department of State to implement specific sanctions in shaping policy toward the country.(9)

“In 2020, the U.S. Department of State recognized Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern due to the severity of religious freedom violations. However, the subsequent removal of this designation in 2021 raised concerns among human rights organizations. Critics pointed out that Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s assertion that the violence was not religiously motivated contradicted extensive documentation from Amnesty International, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), Open Doors, and Human Rights Watch regarding systematic attacks on religious minorities.”(10)

Given the ongoing and escalating violence toward religious minorities in Nigeria, efforts are underway in Congress to reinstate the previous designation assigned to Nigeria by the Department of State in 2020. On March 11, H. Res. 220 was introduced by U.S. Representative Christopher Smith (R-NJ-4) to once again classify Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern. The resolution is currently under review by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. By passing this resolution, the U.S. Congress would send a message to the Nigerian government that the continued religious violence and persecution may result in tangible diplomatic and economic actions.(11)

International Christian Concern and other human rights groups strongly support this legislation. We must continue to pray and advocate for the protection, safety, and religious freedom of our brothers and sisters in Nigeria. If you, the reader, are a U.S. citizen, please contact your U.S. Representative and urge them to support H. Res. 220.

1. <https://adfinternational.org/commentary/nigeria-most-dangerous-country-christians#>
2. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1198134/christians-killed-by-terrorist-groups-in-nigeria>
3. <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/nigeria-is-worst-in-the-world-for-persecution-of-christians-in-2021>
4. <https://www.persecution.org/2025/04/16/54-christians-killed-following-palm-sunday-service/>
5. <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/nigeria/>
6. Ibid.
7. <https://www.persecution.org/2025/04/01/suspect-fulani-militants-kill-11-in-brutal-assault-on-christian-farming-community/>
8. <https://www.persecution.org/2025/04/16/54-christians-killed-following-palm-sunday-service/>
9. <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2025-04/Nigeria%202025%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report.pdf>
10. <https://www.persecution.org/2025/04/10/u-s-lawmakers-advocate-for-renewed-cpc-designation-for-nigeria/>
11. Ibid.

## **Troubling Trends: Escalating Persecution of Christians in Africa**

### **Part Two: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**

By Linda Burkle, PhD

This article is the second in a three-part series focusing on the ongoing and escalating persecution of Christians in large regions across Africa. The rise of various Islamic militant groups, coupled with complicit, corrupt, or ineffective governments, is primarily responsible for the growing violence perpetrated against Christians. This violence is not bound by state borders and often involves others from neighboring countries who share the same ideological and political objectives. In this segment, I address the persecution occurring in DRC, which has increased at an alarming rate in recent years. I will especially highlight atrocities committed [the first quarter](#) in 2025.

Several years ago, I had the privilege of ministering throughout DRC as an “ambassador” from the U.S. within the context of a specific denomination that has a formidable presence in the country. It was a great honor. I spoke in front of roughly 2,000 women at women’s seminars and had the opportunity to preach at a church opening. In addition, I visited several church-sponsored projects, such as a school for the blind and a maternity hospital.

DRC can be considered a Christian nation. According to various sources, 95% of the population is Christian; of those, roughly half are Catholics and about half are Protestants. With this overwhelming majority, it is even more puzzling that brutal attacks on Christians can occur with impunity. Christians living in the eastern provinces, North Kivu in particular, are most vulnerable to attack.

While there are several militant groups committing violence toward Christians, the Allied Democratic Forces, an Islamic State group (ISIS) affiliate, is the primary source of atrocities. They are responsible for abducting and killing Christians and attacking churches with increasing boldness and brutality, leading to widespread terror, insecurity, and displacement. They are ostensibly embedded within the corrupt and weak government and therefore, are not effectively brought to justice.

In addition, other groups, such as the M23 rebel group, which is reportedly supported by Rwanda, also target Christian civilians. Compounding the situation is family and community pressure on new Christian converts to return to Islam. Christian leaders who advocate for fair elections are harassed. “This mix of militant threats, family pressures and political interference creates a dangerous and fearful environment for Christians in Eastern Congo.”(1)

“The last year has seen an escalation in attacks against Christians from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). These are Islamist extremists with ties to the Islamic State group. Coordinated attacks have killed dozens, displaced thousands and left believers living in fear. Christians in the DRC have faced high levels of violence for several years, but this year the attacks against followers of Jesus have been even more brazen and shocking.”(2)

Open Doors World Watch List included DRC for the first time in 2021, when it was ranked No. 40 among the worst countries for persecution.(3) Since that time, violent attacks have increased dramatically. In 2023, it was ranked No. 37 out of the Top 50 countries on the World Watch List. “Ongoing violence in DRC has displaced 6.9 million civilians, including 2.3 million in North Kivu and 1.6 million in Ituri, according to a 2023 UN report.”(4) Although DRC received an overall ranking of No. 41 in 2024, it was listed as one of the Top 10 for violence against Christians.(5) This year, DRC jumped to No. 35 with the dramatic escalation of attacks against Christians.(6)

#### **Attacks on Christians in 2025**

Below is a list of specific incidents of attacks on Christians that have occurred thus far in 2025. While this list is not intended to be exhaustive, it highlights the frequency and brutality perpetrated toward Christians. Most of this information was provided to me by my colleague, Pastor Shalom Koronge, of Nairobi, Kenya. Through his networking with colleagues in DRC and other African nations, he provided valuable information on the current plight of Christians living in these countries and others as well. I am grateful for his “on the ground” observations and reports. Unless otherwise noted, specific incidents of violence and persecution have been provided by Pastor Koronge during a telephone conference on April 14. The Allied Defense Forces are principally responsible for these attacks.

- March 11 — Kirindera village, Beni territory, North Kivu: At least 19 people killed, several buildings set ablaze, including houses, a health clinic, and a hotel.
- March 11 — Ngite village in Beni territory, North Kivu: Four people were killed.(7)
- March 9 — Mukondi village, North Kivu: At least 36 people killed; villagers were trapped in burning houses or murdered with machetes and hatchets.
- March 8 — Ngohi Vuyinga, Lubero Territory, North Kivu: 9 villagers killed, dozens displaced, and several houses burned down.
- March 5 — Sambuco and Makayana, Ituri Province: 19 Christians killed, 15 homes and several motorbikes burned.
- Feb. 12 — Kasanga, Lubero Territory, North Kivu: More than 70 Christians beheaded in a Protestant church after being abducted from the village of Mayba.
- Feb. 2 — Near Ndalya, Ituri Province: 28 Christians killed in attacks on three villages.
- Jan. 24 to Feb. 2 — Mutwanga, North Kivu province, suffered multiple horrific attacks by the Allied Defense Forces. In Loulo, the epicenter of these attacks, more than 121 residents have been killed.(8)
- Jan. 29 — Lubero District, North Kivu: Nine Christians killed, about 30 houses burned down.
- Jan. 15 — Makoko and Masakuki, Lubero, North Kivu: 53 Christians killed; 41 in Makoko and 12 in Masakuki.

### **International Response**

After 13 years of U.N. peacekeeping, forces were deployed to DRC to curtail violence. In March 2024, they began to withdraw. The peacekeeping mission had become increasingly unpopular with Congolese government leaders. The withdrawal of 18,000 U.N. peacekeepers concluded in December 2024, one year after it was approved by the U.N. Security Council. However, the country remains plagued with violence and corruption, and conditions have only worsened for Christians.(9)

Despite DRC’s escalating and brutal violence against Christians, neither the U.S. State Department(10) nor the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) have yet to identify it as a “country of particular concern.”(11) Such omissions discount the level of persecution Christians suffer, seemingly with little international recognition or support. While the U.S. State Department has designated the Allied Defense Forces as a terrorist group,(12) it has yet to sufficiently address the persecution of Christians with the DRC government.

However, the European Parliament passed a resolution, B10-0212/2025, condemning the “targeted attacks” against Christians in DRC and “defending religious freedom and security.” (2025/2612(RSP) The resolution calls on the DRC government to address ongoing corruption and bring the perpetrators of violence to justice. It also proposes to “suspend the implementation of the memorandum of understanding on sustainable raw materials value chains signed with Rwanda in February 2024, in the light of credible reports linking Rwanda to the illicit exploitation and export of minerals from the eastern DRC, including through its support for the M23 armed group; stresses that the continuation of this agreement risks fueling the ongoing conflict, undermining regional stability and leading to the further killing of Christians in the region.”(13)

I think of those many Christians I met years ago and wonder how many of them have been killed or displaced. It is sobering to consider. I pray that the global community would apply sanctions that effectively produce change in the DRC governmental leaders, cleaning house of corruption, and bringing perpetrators of violence to justice. Meanwhile, we must advocate, however possible, for the persecuted Christians and pray for them to live in peace and security.

1. <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/>
2. Ibid.
3. <https://media.opendoorsuk.org/document/pdf/WorldWatchListreport-2021.pdf>
4. <https://www.opendoorsus.org/persecution/wwl2023-map>
5. [https://www.opendoors.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/WWL24\\_Report.pdf](https://www.opendoors.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/WWL24_Report.pdf)
6. <https://www.opendoorsus.org/en-US/persecution/countries/drc/>
7. <https://www.persecution.org/2025/02/28/a-village-torn-apart-the-agony-of-mutwanga-under-adf-terror/>
8. <https://www.persecution.org/2025/02/28/a-village-torn-apart-the-agony-of-mutwanga-under-adf-terror/>
9. <https://www.persecution.org/2024/03/03/un-peacekeepers-in-drc-begin-withdrawal/>
10. <https://www.state.gov/countries-of-particular-concern-special-watch-list-countries-entities-of-particular-concern/>
11. <https://www.uscirf.gov/>
12. <https://www.dni.gov/nctc/ftos.html>
13. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-10-2025-0212\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-10-2025-0212_EN.html)

## **Troubling Trends: Escalating Persecution of Christians in Africa**

### **Part Three: Kenya**

By Linda Burkle, PhD In this section, I will address the growing persecution of Christians in Kenya. Like my time in DRC, I had the privilege of ministering in Kenya several years ago. I participated in and spoke at a large conference of pastors and lay leaders from several African countries. The conference occurred in Nairobi at a church center compound, which also included an orphanage. We were also able to minister to the children, which was personally a great blessing.

Kenya is not a country that automatically comes to mind in the context of the persecution of Christians. Although it has not been listed on the Open Doors World Watch List for several years, this is a result of increasing persecution globally and does not reflect less persecution in Kenya, where it has increased significantly. Like DRC, Christians represent the majority of the population at 85.5%, with the remainder being primarily Muslim, according to a 2019 census.<sup>(1)</sup> However, a 2022 Demographic Survey by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics found that, of the almost 46,000 respondents aged 15 to 49, Christians — consisting of 18.6% Catholics and 72.9% Protestants or other Christians — comprised 91.5%, Muslims 7.1%, other religions 0.4%, and no religion 1.1%.<sup>(2)</sup> Many Christians and Muslims alike incorporate traditional religions, such as spiritism and witchcraft, into their religious practices.

Religious affiliations are often tied to ethnicity, with members of the same tribe adhering to the same religion. The largest ethnic tribes, the Kikuyu, Luhya, Kalenjin, Luo, and Kamba, are predominantly Christian. Most Muslims who are ethnic Somalis and Swahili live in the Northeast and coastal areas, as well as in some urban areas of Nairobi. In addition, Kenya is the home of several refugee camps, where more than half a million refugees and asylum seekers who practice a variety of religions are living.

In recent years, incidents of persecution of Christians have increased, particularly in the Northeast, where 90% of the population are fervent Muslim Somalis. The Voice of Martyrs reported that “in these areas, Christian missionaries from other parts of Kenya and converts from Islam are often attacked and have been killed. There are some churches in these regions, but their activities are severely limited by the local communities. The Kenyan constitution grants every citizen freedom of religion, but local governments in resistant areas are led by Muslim officials who do little to protect the rights of believers.”<sup>(3)</sup> Corrupt government officials are often complicit in attacks committed with impunity. Christians cannot openly share their faith due to threats of violence and the risk of losing livelihoods. Christians who have converted from Islam face severe persecution and pressure from their families and communities. A growing presence of radical terrorist groups in the Northeast and coastal areas monitors Christians. New converts are under constant threat of attack, especially from family members and neighbors.<sup>(4)</sup>

The Somalia-based al-Shabab Islamic terrorist group is active in this region, attacking Christians, bombing churches, and killing believers. “Hotspots for attacks by al-Shabaab include Mombasa, Mandera, Garissa, Wajir, Lamu and Tana River. In these areas, many local informants assist in organizing attacks on churches and Christians. As a result, many believers have chosen to relocate from these areas to the centre of the country.”<sup>(5)</sup> In November 2024, International Christian Concern reported that it provided housing, food, clothing, and other supplies as well as motorbikes to internally displaced Christians fleeing persecution.<sup>(^)</sup>

According to information provided by Pastor Shalom Koronge during a telephone conference in 2024, “Christian missionaries from South Korea, David Lee and his mother-in-law, Hiwi Sokk Cheon, were kidnapped by suspected Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) also known as the Oromo Liberation Front-Shane, an Ethiopian-based terrorist group that operates in the Ethiopian-Kenyan northern border.”<sup>(7)</sup> This terrorist group collaborates with al-Shabab and is active in northern Kenya.



## Changes in 2025

Unless otherwise noted, the following information is provided by Pastor Koronge of Nairobi, Kenya, based on his personal observations and reports from his Kenyan colleagues. He stated that “All the sufferings are spoken in hushed tones for fear of punishment by either of the Islamic terror groups. In late March, a pastor was poisoned at a restaurant.”(8) Due to the reluctance to report incidents, undoubtedly persecution is underreported. Despite the Christian majority, Pastor Koronge stated that Muslims are “systematically taking over key sectors of society. They are buying out businesses and taking over key government offices. Muslims are strategically importing radicalized Somalians who are becoming citizens through bribery of corrupt government officials. This is a current concerning trend.”(9) With a growing population of radicalized immigrants coupled with a complicit government, the threat of persecution increases.

In northern Kenya, where persecution is most extreme, Koronge’s colleagues, Pastor Joseph and Pastor Branu, provide care for recent Christian converts facing persecution. Pastor Joseph cares for 120 converts, 80 of whom are women. As they face of rejection and intimidation, he provides for their basic needs. “Pastor Branu recently received under his care a woman chased by her husband from her land for converting to Christianity. She converted with one of her children and the husband chased them away. Such incidents remain rampant in a region dominated by Islam.”(10)

## International Response

Due to the multitude of countries in which persecution is at an epidemic level, the international community has not focused much on Kenya. Unfortunately, as violent terrorist attacks continue to increase, most likely Kenya will receive more notice. Tragically, how many Christians will be killed or displaced to catch the attention of entities that could pressure Kenya to address the persecution?

Thankfully, the terrorist group of al-Shabab, the primary perpetrator of violent attacks, has been designated as an “entity of particular concern” by both the USCIRF and the U.S. State Department. “An Entity of Particular Concern or EPC, as defined in the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998, as amended, is a nonstate group that engages in particularly severe violations of religious freedom and is also a nonsovereign entity that exercises significant political power and territorial control; is outside the control of a sovereign government; and often employs violence in pursuit of its objectives.”(11) In March, 2024, “suspected al-Shabaab militants reportedly killed six Christian merchants who were known for proselytizing in a Muslim community near the Somalia-Kenya border.”(12) However, in violence-ridden areas, this group is covertly assisted by government officials who are complicit as well.

As I think about those Kenyans suffering, often in secrecy due to fear, I issue a call for prayer and action. Please join me, we can make a difference.

1. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kenya/>
2. Ibid.
3. <https://www.persecution.com/globalprayerguide/kenya/>
4. Ibid.
5. <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/2024/kenya/>
6. <https://www.persecution.org/2024/11/18/standing-strong-helping-families-driven-from-their-homes-in-kenya/>
7. Telephone conference with Pastor Shalom Koronge of Niarobi, Kenya on April 14, 2025.
8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2025-03/2025%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

12. Ibid.