

democratic republic of the congo

PERSECUTION 101




A photograph showing three children peering through a narrow horizontal opening in a thick, weathered wooden wall. The children's faces are partially visible, with their eyes looking directly at the camera. The wall is made of rough, brown wood with some dark stains and a hole through which they are looking. The background behind them is a bright, outdoor setting.

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PERSECUTION 101

Terrorist violence makes DRC a dangerous place for the Christian-majority population to live.

Regional political tensions, severe economic hardship, and a raging terrorist insurgency make the DRC a dangerous place for the Christian-majority population. Now an Islamic State affiliate, the Allied Democratic Forces is a growing threat to peace and stability in the east and threatens to metastasize beyond its current confines. National and international military efforts to combat terrorism have thus far been ineffective, stymied by longstanding tensions between countries in the region. In this violence, peaceful religious practice and the norms of everyday life are hard to come by.



QUICK FACTS



Type of Government

Semi-presidential Republic



Chief Executive

Felix Tshisekedi of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress, *since 2019*



Total Population

Approx. 111.86 million
(2023 estimate)



Religious Demography

93.1% Christian - 104.1 million
2.8% Kimbanguist - 3.1 million
1.3% Muslim - 1.4 million
2.8% other



Ethnic Demography

41% Bantu groups
17% Batéké groups
13% M'Boshi groups
6% Sangha groups
23% Other groups



TYPES OF PERSECUTION



Terrorist Violence

Terrorist insurgencies throughout the country affect the free practice of religion, particularly in the east where the jihadist Allied Defense Force holds a great deal of power



Social Pressure

Tensions between communities sometimes spills over into the religious sphere



ICC IN DRC

Violence in the DRC makes relief and development work in the country a dangerous endeavor. Terrorists work fluidly across borders, complicating not only the effort to combat them militarily but also the efforts of organizations like ICC. In 2022, militant terrorists shot down U.N. helicopter with eight persons aboard, including peacekeepers and observers. Dozens of aid workers, teachers, and peacekeepers have been killed by these groups over the years.

ICC aids Christians affected this violence through educational assistance, livelihood projects, and medical care. In one of its projects, ICC helps to support an orphanage of about 100 children who lost their parents to Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) violence. ICC helped the orphanage set up a small fish farm and provided food, medicine, safe water, clothing, and mattresses for the children. Though only a small answer to the bigger issues at play in the DRC, projects like these are an essential lifeline for many suffering Congolese Christians.

Political Backgrounder for Religious Freedom Issues in the DRC

Extreme poverty is a widespread phenomenon in the DRC. Approximately 7 million persons are internally displaced in the DRC, with more than a million spread out in neighboring countries. Malnourishment is rampant, with a median age of 16.7—one of the lowest in the world. Just 2.49% of the population makes it to the age of 65.

Christianity spread to the DRC in the late 1400s with the rise of colonial Portuguese exploitation in the region. The faith's rise to its status today as the dominant religion, though, began in the late 1800s when Belgium colonized Congo. The modern state, which declared independence in 1960, is secular and, on paper, extends various protections to religion in its constitution.

As in many parts of the world, Islamist terrorist organizations like ADF in the DRC exploit desperation and poverty as a recruiting tactic. When ADF was founded in 1995, it espoused extremist Islamist ideology. Over the years that rhetoric faded as it focused on regrouping from losses sustained in the late 1990s and early 2000s. ADF conducted few violent attacks from 2001 to 2012. When it resumed its violence in 2013, there was less of a religious component to the language they used than when they conducted attacks in the 1990s.

In 2019, though, ADF's language became increasingly extremist when it forged official ties with Islamic State. In 2020, ADF leader Musa Baluku shared in a propaganda video that ADF had been dissolved and fully incorporated into the Islamic State conglomerate. ADF's self-declared new name is the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP).

Since that time, ADF has again become primarily marked by Islamist extremism—unwelcome news for Christians not just in DRC but in neighboring Uganda and Mozambique as well, two countries also within ADF's sphere of influence. ISCAP is already targeting Christians more often than ADF was before and is spreading east toward Mozambique.

While the international community recognizes the extreme danger posed by terrorism in Mozambique, it does not seem to fully appreciate the element of religious extremism within these organizations. In searching for long term solutions to terrorism in the country, it is important that the world address not just the economic roots of the insurgency but the ideological ones as well. Whether through targeted information campaigns on the ground or specific efforts to protect religious communities in the DRC, it is vital that the world recognize the persecution happening and address it accordingly. Only then can a workable solution be reached.

Resources and Reports

[ICC's 2022 POY Report — ADF Chapter](#)

[State Department 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom — DRC Chapter](#)
[War on Christians in Democratic Republic of the Congo](#)

