

“They have taken everything except our Faith”

More than 100 died – either being shot or burnt alive – after UN peacekeepers left IDPs at a Church-run refugee camp to the mercy of extremists.

On 15th November 2018, at around 8.30 in the morning, ex-Séléka members of the so-called Union for Peace in the Central African Republic attacked the camp in the grounds of the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Alindao.

They fired mortar rockets at the camp, before looting and burning it.

UN troops left as soon as the assault began, and were accused of complicity with rebel groups.

At least 112 people died – including women, children, the elderly and disabled – and 18,000 IDPs who had already fled their homes when they were attacked were again left homeless.

Witnesses claim extremists specifically targeted diocesan Vicar General Father Mada Blaise and Father Célestin Ngoumango who were easily identifiable because of their cassocks.

The massacre was allegedly carried out in retaliation for the recent Anti-Balaka murder of two men.

Alindao (185 miles east of capital Bangui) has suffered from repeated assaults by ex-Séléka terrorists since 2017 – but with help from ACN the Church is responding to the humanitarian catastrophe.

One Christian told us: “The water we drink comes from the streams we bathe in. We are dying of malaria, fever and diarrhoea because we lack of essential drugs and doctors.”

Responding to the most pressing needs, the Church is providing emergency aid including:

- Basic medicines and health care
- Hygiene and sanitation
- Children’s education
- Clothing

IDPs have been prioritised in the distribution of help, as have children and pregnant women.

Speaking about the raids by ex-Séléka extremists the Christian told ACN: “They have taken everything except our Faith - it’s the only precious thing we have left and nobody can steal it.”

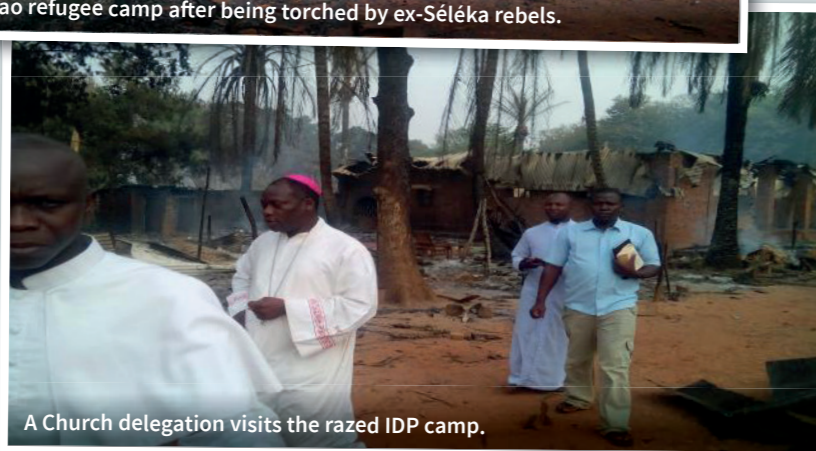
Only through your generous love are we able to respond to crisis situations like this. 🙏



Sacred Heart Cathedral, Alindao, after the attack.



Alindao refugee camp after being torched by ex-Séléka rebels.



A Church delegation visits the razed IDP camp.



A priest speaks with UN troops and guards following the attack.

The situation of countries in northern Africa and the Middle East

The situation is bad for many countries in northern Africa and the Middle East – but the Central African Republic is the only one that got worse, according to research carried out for Aid to the Church in Need’s 2019 *Persecuted and Forgotten?* report

EGYPT — NO CHANGE

Protests against churches being built, kidnapping of women and bomb attempts continue.

NIGERIA — NO CHANGE

Attacks on Christians by militants continue.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC ▼ WORSE

Attacks on Christians and others increased as country continues to destabilise.

SUDAN — NO CHANGE

Despite fall of President al-Bashir, churches continue to endure oppression and discrimination.

IRAQ ▲ BETTER

Still difficulties, but Christians have been able to return home following fall of Daesh (ISIS).



Central African Republic incidents from *Persecuted and Forgotten?*

MAY 2018 At least 19 people including Father Albert Baba were killed and about 120 injured in an attack during Mass on 1st May at Our Lady of Fatima’s Church, Bangui. Parish priest Father Moses Otii said attackers “outnumbered the police and the police retreated. Then the attackers started shooting at the church and throwing hand grenades at the people.” See “**A Massacre at Mass**” inside for more details – including how ACN helped.

NOVEMBER 2018 101 Christians and 11 Muslims were killed when an ex-Séléka group called the Union for Peace attacked a Church-run IDP camp in Alindao. Among those killed in the massacre on the 15th November were Pastor Gabriel Singa and two priests, Father Mada Blaise and Father Célestin Ngoumango.

The camp, which sheltered over 26,000 people, was totally destroyed. Bishop Cyr-Nestor Yapaupa of Alindao said: “The old people and the handicapped were simply burned alive, if they were not already shot dead or beheaded. ... The attackers simply fired indiscriminately on the people.” UN troops allegedly colluded with militants. See “**They have taken everything except our Faith**” inside for more details – including how ACN is helping.

MAY 2019 The body of 77-year-old Sister Ines Nieves Sancho was found beheaded and mutilated in Nola, south-west CAR near the border with Chad. During the night of 19th-20th May, assailants entered her home and, dragging her to the workshop where she held sewing lessons for local girls, slit her throat. Ex-Séléka militants, calling themselves 3R, were blamed for the attack. 🙏

Crisis in the Central African Republic



This is the Carmelite Mission in Bozoum where 4,500 people fled to after militants attacked their homes. It is one of numerous Church-run refugee camps in the Central African Republic (CAR) caring for some of the country’s more than 640,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs).

One of the key findings of ACN’s 2019 *Persecuted and Forgotten?* report is that a rising tide of extreme violence is afflicting the Church in Africa. Inside you will read more about the crisis in the CAR – and across Africa – and how Aid to the Church in Need is helping Christians threatened by inhumanity and violence. 🙏

A refugee camp in the grounds of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Monastery, Bangui.



“80 percent of the country is controlled by rebels” – The situation in the Central African Republic

The crisis began in the Central African Republic after militant group Séléka seized power in 2013. After Séléka's leader Michel Djotodia was declared president, he dissolved the militia group that had brought him to power.

But Séléka rebels – predominantly Muslim mercenaries from neighbouring countries – did not give up their arms. Smaller bands of ex-Séléka fighters caused havoc by looting, raping



A displaced child in Bangui.

and pillaging. While Séléka was not an Islamist group, some ex-Séléka factions have targeted Christians and Church-run facilities.

Anti-Balaka (literally anti-machete) militias formed to protect areas from the ex-Séléka fighters. Often incorrectly called Christian militias by the media, they are formed of non-Muslims including Christians and Animists. But many Anti-Balaka militias have sought power for themselves. Both sides have terrorised Christians and Muslims alike, causing enormous suffering.

Bishop Nestor Nongo-Aziagba of Bossangoa, president of CAR's bishops' conference, stressed that this is "a political crisis, not a religious crisis."

Estimating "that some 80 percent of the country is controlled by rebel groups" Bishop Nestor said that all groups wanted the country's mineral wealth.

Militants have wracked havoc. There are estimated to be more than 640,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country.

Yet the Church is responding in love to the crisis – and Aid to the Church in Need is backing their vital work, providing emergency aid for IDPs including medical care, clothing and other essential help.

Bishop Nestor said: "We give shelter to the refugees and help those who are in need, without regard to their religion."

ACN has also supported priests and Sisters ministering in the conflict, and helped rebuild churches destroyed by rebel action.

Bishop Nestor added: **"I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to ACN for the many different ways in which it has supported us during these difficult moments of crisis."**



Bishop Nestor Nongo-Aziagba of Bossangoa.

A Massacre at Mass

"A group of armed men came in to the church during Mass. They threw grenades at the congregation while they were praying. As gunshots rang out, Christians panicked, running everywhere to escape."

20 died during the attack on Our Lady of Fatima Church, in the capital Bangui, including Fr Albert Baba – and 140 were injured.

The day after, we received a request for emergency help from Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga, the Archbishop of Bangui.

He wrote: "Today, I come again to knock on the door of your generosity to look after the wounded."

"In our country, everyone pays for the medicines... This is why I ask for your help to show the compassion and closeness of the Church to our brothers."

The bishop told us about the emergency medical needs of those injured in the attack.

"In the hope of your help, in order to practice the works of corporal mercy towards our brothers and sisters who



Fr Albert Baba, who was killed during the May 2018 Church attack, stands to the left of Cardinal Dieudonné.

are victims of this tragedy, please be assured, dear friends, of the expression of my prayers for ACN and your generous benefactors."

We couldn't refuse Archbishop Dieudonné's urgent plea and immediately

assured him of our help and prayers for his people.

But without your generous love we wouldn't have been in a position to respond so quickly with the aid he desperately needed.



Children attending a Mass celebrated by Fr Albert in his parish St Joseph Mukasa.

May God bless you for your generosity which allows us to respond rapidly at times of real crisis, and meant our brothers and sisters in Bangui could receive the vital aid they required. ✝

Building bridges between Muslims and Christians

Trust is breaking down between Christians and Muslims following numerous ex-Séléka and Anti-Balaka attacks – but the Church is striving to rebuild bridges.

One such project is running in Zemio, which has been the scene of countless attacks. The worst occurred in September 2017, when dozens of armed men descended on the town.

They ransacked the Catholic Church compound, where around 15,000 IDPs had sought refuge. Most fled over the border to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Father Louis Tongagnesi was hacked to death just outside Zemio by ex-Séléka rebels.

Priests accused UN troops of deliberately abandoning the town to the mercy of the rebels.

With ACN's backing, the Church is breathing life back in to the town in south-east CAR and restoring harmony between Christians and Muslims.

Bishop Juan-José Aguirre Muñoz of Bangassou told ACN: **"I have just spent two weeks in Zemio... seeing the damage caused by violent militiamen who used fire as a weapon of war to burn countless homes and entire neighbourhoods."**

Bangassou Diocese has opened new schools and in a bid to promote peace and harmony is inviting Muslim and Christian students to attend.

They are also helping build new family homes, providing roofing straw and doors and windows if families provide other materials.

This is just one project helping build a more harmonious future between Christians and Muslims. ✝



The Church in the CAR is supporting a number of initiatives to heal tensions between the Christian and Muslim communities. Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga, Archbishop of Bangui, is seen here with Imam Oumar Kobine Layama – together they have launched a number of peace initiatives.

Across Africa – a round-up of Persecuted and Forgotten? findings



Rebel soldiers in the Diocese of Bouar

One of the key findings of ACN's 2019 Persecuted and Forgotten? report is "From Nigeria in West Africa to Madagascar in the east, Christians in parts of Africa are threatened by Islamists seeking to eliminate the Church". While religion has not driven the crisis in the Central African Republic, it has played a part in numerous attacks across the country. Yet elsewhere radical religion was a key driver.

● **In Nigeria.** Boko Haram in the north and militant Islamist Fulani herdsmen in the 'Middle Belt' have continued a reign of terror against Christians and Muslims. Nigeria is the country where the most Christians are killed, with a reported 3,731 slain in 2018.

Across Africa, jihadi violence against Christians remained at critical levels:

● **In Niger,** Bishop Ambroise Ouédraogo

of Maradi told ACN in June 2019 that Islamist fundamentalist attacks on Christians happen "time and again". Added to violence and intimidation was a concerted effort by extremists – with access to considerable foreign resources – to coerce Christians into converting.

In other parts of Africa, the main threat came from the state:

● **In Sudan,** the regime carried out extreme persecution in 2017-19, bulldozing a church in Khartoum, "beating" converts from Islam in South Darfur and attacking 70 churches in the Nuba Mountains. The ousting of President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 has not ended anti-Christian persecution.

● **In Eritrea,** the state confiscated and closed down the last remaining 21 Catholic-run hospitals, health centres and clinics in June 2019 – institutions that served at least 170,000 people every year. ✝



Persecuted and Forgotten? is Aid to the Church in Need's biennial report looking at the oppression of Christians around the world.

The report can be downloaded online from **23rd October 2019 at www.acnuk.org/persecuted**