

Al-Qaida Claims Responsibility for Christian Aid Worker Murder

✖ Al-Qaida's North Africa branch on Thursday said it killed an American aid worker in Mauritania this week for allegedly trying to convert Muslims to Christianity, according to the Associated Press (AP).

In an audio statement released to Al-Jazeera TV, al-Qaida of the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility for the murder of 39-year-old Christopher Ervin Leggett of Tennessee. Witnesses said he was shot several times on Tuesday by at least two gunmen who rushed up to him on a street in Mauritania's capital, Nouakchott.

"Two knights of the Islamic Maghreb succeeded Tuesday morning at 8 a.m. to kill the infidel American Christopher Leggett for his Christianizing activities," al-Qaida said in its statement, according to the AP. Authorities are trying to verify the statement.

Although Mauritania is considered a moderate Muslim nation, extremist violence has increased there in recent years.

Leggett, who grew up in Cleveland, Tenn., had been living in the North African nation with his wife, Jackie, and their four children for six years. He did humanitarian work while teaching at a school specializing in computer science in El Kasr, a lower-class neighborhood in Nouakchott, according to relatives in Tennessee.

The Rev. Jim Gibson, co-pastor of First Baptist Church of Cleveland, said Leggett was a church member but worked in Mauritania independently. He said Leggett's family is returning from Mauritania, and a funeral may be held at the

church on Tuesday.

Mauritania's Interior Ministry told the AP on Thursday that it was investigating Leggett's death and security forces were doing "all they can to catch the criminals."