

Christians Under Attack in Somalia

✖ Islamic militants have killed another leader of the underground church movement in Somalia, sources said.

Before

he was fatally shot on May 4 in Xarardheere, about 37 miles from Jowhar, 57-year-old Yusuf Ali Nur had been on a list of people the Islamic extremist al Shabaab suspected of being Christian, sources who spoke on condition of anonymity told Compass Direct News. Al Shabaab, said to have links to al-Qaeda, has vowed to rid Somalia of Christianity.

The

militants fighting the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Mogadishu had been engaged in a two-hour battle with a rival rebel group, the Ahlu Sunna Waljamer, which had taken control of the Xarardheere area, before they came across Nur. Nur had lived in Xarardheere since leaving Jowhar in July 2009.

Eyewitnesses

said that after al Shabaab took control of the area, they went from house to house looking for enemy fighters when they arrived at Nur's rented home at about 10:30 a.m. Sources said that upon finding Nur, one of the militants remarked, "Oh! This is Yusuf, whom we have been looking for," before they sprayed him with bullets at close range.

Nur

is survived by his wife, whose name was withheld for security reasons, and three children, ages 11, 9 and 7.

This

latest death comes after several execution-style murders of Somalis suspected of being members of a suppressed yet resilient underground faith movement in Somalia. A number of Christians have been beheaded by the radical Islamists out to topple the fledgling TFG and introduce a strict version of shariah, or Islamic law.

Al

Shabaab,

which controls large parts of central Somalia, recently banned radio stations from playing music and outlawed bell ringing that signals the end of school classes "because they sound like church bells."

Nur,

who had worked on a farm while in Jowhar, had long being monitored by al Shabaab, the sources said. After settling in Xarardheere, he became the head teacher of Ganane Primary School and also taught English. The al Shabaab militants object to the use of English, preferring Arabic. And even after relocating to Xarardheere, Nur realized he was in danger of the militants finding him, sources said.

Ganane

is a private school owned by wealthy Somali proprietors.

In 2009 Islamic militants in Somalia sought out and killed at least 15 Christians, including women and children. This year, on Jan. 1 al Shabaab members murdered 41-year-old Mohammed Ahmed Ali after the Christian had left his home in Hodan, on the outskirts of Mogadishu.

On March 15, al Shabaab rebels shot Madobe Abdi to death on March 15 at 9:30 a.m. in Mahaday village, 31 miles north of Jowhar. Abdi's death was distinctive in that he was not a convert from Islam. An orphan, Abdi was raised as a Christian

Advocacy group International Christian Concern has reported that three members of al Shabaab killed Somali Christian Mu'awiye Hilowle Ali in front of his home in Afgoye on March 23, executing him with close-range shots to his head and chest.

The transitional government in Mogadishu fighting to retain control of the country treats Christians little better than the al Shabaab extremists do. While proclaiming himself a moderate, President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed has embraced a version of sharia that mandates the death penalty for those who leave Islam.