

Indonesia: The Horrors of Jihad

Thousands of Christians have died, fled their homes or endured forced circumcision and conversion to Islam as Muslim extremists press their 'holy war' in the Moluccas.

Duma is one of thousands of island villages that dot the crescent-shaped archipelago of Indonesia's Molucca Islands, a paradise rich in natural resources, unspoiled beaches and botanical gardens. Although 88 percent of Indonesia's 210 million residents are Islamic, Muslims have lived harmoniously in the north Moluccas for years with their Christian, Buddhist and Hindu neighbors.

For Christians, that harmony ended in January 1999 when a series of small domestic quarrels throughout Indonesia's north Moluccas led to a jihad, or "holy war," waged by Muslim extremists against non-Muslims. Since then, Duma has become one of hundreds of Christian villages that have been attacked by Muslim militants connected to the Laskar Jihad, or "warriors of the holy war."

By June of last year Laskars had made 21 attacks on Duma, and the village's 1,500 Christian residents were living in constant fear of another jihad scourging. On June 19 lookouts warned that Laskar Muslims were approaching. Christians in the village were outnumbered and lacked the sophisticated weaponry needed to defend themselves.

"We did everything we could to defend our village and church," says a leader from Duma, named Obie. "I told everyone to run to the church, hoping we could defend ourselves [there]."

Crude attempts were made to thwart the attackers. Sixteen-year-old Tina ran to the church and rolled fuel drums into the path of the advancing warriors to form a barricade. Bullets

passed through the drums and hit her legs.

"I just didn't want them to take our church," she said. "I fell to the ground wounded and was helped by some of the young people. [Jihad warriors] burned my father alive and cut my brother to pieces with their machetes."

The Christian men held off the attack at the front door of the church while the women and children escaped through the back door into the jungle. When the men finally ran for their lives, the Laskars called after them: "We are going to catch you and cut you up into tiny pieces!"

Obie was unable to run fast because he carried his young son in his arms. One of the warriors slashed at Obie, slicing his neck.

"With God's help, I managed to grab his machete and slew him," Obie said. "This caused the other warriors to fear, so they ran away."

Back in the village, Christians who didn't make it to the safety of the church scattered everywhere, running for their lives. One woman named Selena cried out, "Lord, help us!" A jihad warrior came up to her and said, "I'll show you how God helps you," and put a pistol in her mouth and pulled the trigger. Half her face was blown off, though she survived.

Children who did not escape were either killed or captured and taken to Ternate Island where they reportedly are being converted to Islam by members of the Laskar Jihad. Fifty-six of the Christian men who fled with Obie were slain. In all, 400 Duma villagers died in the massacre. Another 120 drowned while trying to escape by boat.

Obie and his son caught up with the women and children in the jungle, and he led the group to the safety of a refugee camp in Manado on the island of Sulawesi. They live there today in crowded conditions with more than 7,000 other Christian

refugees who have survived similar attacks.

In all, the jihad in Indonesia has killed more than 8,000 people on both sides of the fighting and displaced 500,000 into refugee camps where there is little food, overcrowded shelters, poor sanitation and inadequate water. Having little hope of soon rebuilding their lives, Christians gather to worship, often expressing their grief in songs they've written about the loss of loved ones, the destruction and looting of their homes, and the dreams that have been crushed.

"We sing about what happened, but we know God is really good and faithful to us," one refugee singer said. "We wanted to live in peace with the Muslims, and we really didn't think that our neighbors would attack. We don't have guns, but the jihad warriors had arms and bombs, as well as support from the military."

It is often difficult for Indonesian Christians to determine who is for them or against them. The country's president, Abdurrahman Wahid—a Muslim scholar known for his message of tolerance—said in a Dec. 22 speech in the capital, Jakarta: "There is an effort by Islamic extremists to convert Christians to Islam. This is not right."

Though his statement is encouraging, the national military seems divided. Some soldiers protect Christian villages from attacks, but others join the Laskars in massacring Christians.

Many believers who have fled to the jungles have been coaxed out of hiding by the military, who promise them safety but leave them to be captured or killed by waiting jihad warriors. The greatest sympathizers the Christians have are local police, Indonesian animists and Muslim moderates.

Convert or Die!

Pastors are the most hunted of all because there is a \$5,000

(U.S.) bounty paid for each one killed. One pastor, who asked to be identified only as "Yohannen," actively works to help rescue Indonesian Christians. He narrowly escaped jihad machetes during a pastors meeting last year.

When Laskar warriors suddenly appeared at the meeting shouting, "Convert to Islam or die!" he and three other pastors quickly escaped through the back door. Those pastors who weren't able to get away faced two choices—death or denying Christ. Three of them converted to Islam, and four were brutally murdered.

Thousands of other believers have converted to Islam in word only, fearing for their lives and for their children's lives.

According to an eyewitness report by an Indonesian believer who wished only to be identified as "Andrew," on Feb. 5 of last year the village of Lata-Lata was attacked by 6,000 Laskars. Andrew was one of more than 1,000 Christians who tried to defend their families, fighting attackers from 6 a.m. until noon. When the Christians could no longer hold off the attack, they fled to the jungle, where jihad leaders found them and commanded all pastors to give themselves up.

After Andrew's pastor surrendered, he was told that he was being taken by boat to another location where he would be protected. Later, Andrew learned that his pastor was killed on the beach at Chinga Chinga.

The remaining Christians were told they would have to convert to Islam. Although not all of the villagers agreed to do so, the head of the village signed an agreement stating that all would become Muslims.

Over the next month, the entire village of men, women and children were forcibly circumcised without pain medication. Thirty-seven suffered serious infections from the surgeries. They were forced to build a mosque and participate in a festival of circumcision and must say Muslim prayers and chant

verses of the Quran daily.

Andrew escaped on Sept. 16, and on Feb. 21 Andrew's wife told the soldiers she needed to go to Ternate to sell fruit and made her escape with three of their children. A daughter is still in Lata-Lata with Andrew's parents and in-laws.

There has been at least one confirmed report of what is presumed to be a divine intervention. According to Yohannen, when jihad warriors attempted last fall to land their boats several times to attack an island village of Christians, a figure dressed in white with a white beard and riding a white horse appeared on the shore and repelled the attackers. Several of them were reported killed after confusion ensued among their ranks and they turned on one another.

Yohannen stated that investigative teams from the Indonesian military had come to the island to question Christians about the man and said that they were looking for "a white man" who was fighting for the Christians. Believers on the island—who had heard nothing about the incidents—immediately told officials upon hearing their description of the figure that it was Jesus.

At least one human-rights organization is currently involved in trying to rescue Indonesian Christians trapped in the fighting. Steve Snyder, president of the Washington, International Christian Concern (ICC), visited the refugee camps last February during a fact-finding mission.

Snyder, three Australian missionaries and two Indonesian pastors were arrested and detained by security forces on Ternate, a Laskar stronghold. After being interrogated and released, Snyder returned to the United States to inform government officials of his findings and to hold press conferences in an attempt to raise political support and more than \$1.2 million to free Christians and resettle them in safe locations. Christian Aid has since joined the effort, raising

\$50,000 to assist ICC with the project.

Networking with Yohannen and other pastors and leaders in Indonesia, Snyder's organization later hired boats and with an Indonesian Navy escort rescued 1,500 Christians. Snyder continues to raise support to rescue the nearly 6,000 Christians who remain trapped in Indonesia's jihad strongholds.

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