

Somali Mother of Four Slaughtered for her Faith

A mother of four was killed for her Christian faith on Jan. 7 on the outskirts of Mogadishu, Somalia by Islamic extremists from al Shabaab militia, a relative said.

The relative, who requested anonymity, said Asha Mberwa, 36, was killed at 5:15 p.m. in Warbhigly village; the Islamic extremists from the insurgent group had arrested her outside her house the previous day at 8:30 a.m. She died when the militants cut her throat in front of villagers who came out of their homes as witnesses.

She is survived by her children – ages 12, 8, 6 and 4 – and her husband, who was not home at the time she was apprehended. They had married in 1993.

Her relative, whose location is also withheld for security reasons, said he had phoned her on Jan. 5 to try to make arrangements for moving her family out of the area. Al Shabaab extremists, who control large parts of Mogadishu, were able to monitor the conversation and confirm that she had become a Christian, he said. He told Compass by phone that Mberwa feared that she and her family members' lives were threatened.

"Asha had been receiving threatening messages" after al Shabaab monitored her previous communications with him, he said.

Her husband, Abdinazir Mohammed Hassan, fled to an unknown location. Mberwa's relative said a "good Samaritan" in Mogadishu was caring for her four children. The traumatized children continue to weep and cry out for their mother, he said.

Al Shabaab insurgents control much of southern and central Somalia and have embarked on a campaign to rid the country of its hidden Christian population. With estimates of al Shabaab's size ranging from 3,000 to 7,000, the insurgents seek to impose a strict version of sharia (Islamic law).

Al Shabaab was among several splinter groups that emerged after Ethiopian forces removed the Islamic Courts Union, a group of sharia courts, from power in Somalia in 2006. Said to have ties with al Qaeda, al Shabaab has been designated a terrorist organization by several western governments.

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