

# 30 Christians Slaughtered as Sectarian Violence Plagues the Central African Republic

Muslim militants attacked Notre Dame de Fatima in the capital city of the Central African Republic (CAR), Wednesday. The pastor of the church estimated that more than 30 were killed in the attack.

Notre Dame de Fatima, a Roman Catholic compound situated in KM5, a neighborhood located 5 kilometers (or 3.1 miles) from Bangui's city center, suffered an attack by Islamic militants allegedly affiliated with the radical Islamic insurgency known as Séléka. A coalition of largely Muslim forces, Séléka took control of the CAR on March 24, 2013, before being ousted from power in January of this year.

"We were in the church when we heard the shooting outside," the Rev. Freddy Mboula told the Associated Press, saying, "There were screams and after 30 minutes of gunfire there were bodies everywhere."

According to Reuters, the attackers hurled grenades into the compound's "garden," killing 30 of the hundreds that have reportedly sought refuge behind Notre Dame de Fatima's walls.

For months the CAR has been plagued by sectarian violence between Islamic militants, including active Séléka remnants, and anti-balaka (or anti-machete) militias, which have been widely associated with the CAR's Christian populations. Archbishop of Bangui, Dieudonné Nzapalainga, told *Vatican Insider*, "the anti-balaka do not represent the ideas and beliefs of us Christians, even though they are associated with us."

The anti-balaka militias, which initially formed to protect vulnerable communities, have committed reprisal attacks against both Séléka militants and Muslim civilians. Attacks by militia members on Muslim civilians have incited violent reprisals, including the massacre of a Christian family in Bangui and a series of violent attacks perpetrated Easter week against Christians.

Séléka (or “coalition” in Sango, one of two national languages in the CAR) formed as result of an agreement between a fundamentalist group that splintered off the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP) and the Patriotic Convention for Saving the Country (CPSK). While not an overtly religious group, Séléka militants have committed egregious attacks against Christians throughout its 9-month reign under then-President Michel Djotodia.

“Today’s attack on a Christian compound in Bangui tragically exemplifies the ongoing culture of reprisal that has gripped the Central African Republic,” said Cameron Thomas, International Christian Concern’s regional manager for Africa. “As anti-balaka militias continue to commit attacks against both militants and civilians, with Séléka remnants returning such attacks in kind, innocent civilians, including Christians seeking refuge behind church walls, continue to suffer the consequences of growing sectarian violence.

“The future of the Central African Republic will continue to darken so long as the international community does not take decisive action to stem the ongoing violence and bring about the necessary resolution to prevent future attacks.”

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