

Ethiopian Muslims: 'Convert, Leave or Die'

Convert, leave the city or face death. That's the message Muslims in Ethiopia are sending the Christians in Besheno. According to International Christian Concern (ICC), they are posting notices on the doors of Christian homes throughout the city, located in the country's southern region. So far, three Christians have reportedly been forced to flee the city and two have been forced to convert to Islam. Only about 30 Christians remain in the Muslim-majority city.

An ICC statement from Jonathan Racho, regional manager for Africa, said: "We urge Ethiopian officials to bring the perpetrators of the attacks to justice, protect the Christians from further attacks and grant them permits to build a place of worship as well as a cemetery."

At press time, evangelist Kassa Awano remained in critical condition after Muslims attacked him on Nov. 29. A few days afterward, nearly 100 Muslims surrounded a vehicle carrying Christian leaders on their way to negotiate for peace with Muslim leaders. Two men, Tesema Hirego and Niggusie Denano, were seriously wounded. On Jan. 2, Muslims assaulted Temesgen Peteros with a knife after he testified in court about these attacks.

Christians in Besheno have been targeted by Muslims for years. On May 21, 2004, Muslims murdered the 7-year-old daughter of evangelist Tesfaye Hobe. Christians are attacked for listening to Christian songs and watching Christian videos, ICC reports.

According to ICC, officials ignore Christians' appeals for justice and have declined requests for a place of worship and a cemetery. On Jan. 19, a Christian mother buried her deceased

daughter more than 20 miles from Besheno due to the absence of a cemetery for Christians in the city.

The Alaba Province, where Besheno is located, is about 94 percent Muslim and 6 percent Christian.