

Ethiopian Muslims: 'Convert, Leave or Die'

Convert, leave the city or face death.

That's the message Ethiopian Muslims are sending the Christians in Besheno.

According to International Christian Concern (ICC), Muslims are posting notices on the doors of Christian homes. So far, three Christian leaders have reportedly been forced to flee the city and two Christians have been forced to convert to Islam.

Only about 30 Christians remain in the Muslim majority city.

"We are alarmed by the posting of threats on Christian homes and the attacks against Christians in Besheno," says Jonathan Racho, ICC's Regional Manager for Africa. "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."

Evangelist Kassa Awano remains in critical condition after Muslims attacked him on November 29, 2010. A few days after the attack, 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, and the other leaders suffered minor injuries. On January 2, Muslims assaulted Temesgen Peteros with a knife after he testified about the attacks on these Christians in court.

Christians in Besheno have been targeted by Muslims for many years. On May 21, 2004, Muslims murdered the seven-year-old daughter of Evangelist Tesfaye Hobe. Muslims continuously attack Christians for listening to Christian songs and

watching Christian videos, ICC reports.

The local Muslim officials of the city refuse to protect the Christians. According to ICC, officials ignore their appeals for justice, declining repeated requests for the building of a place of worship and a cemetery. On January 19, a Christian mother was forced to bury her deceased daughter in a town more than 20 miles from Besheno, due to the absence of a cemetery for Christians.

Besheno is a city located in the province of Alaba in Southern Ethiopia. According to the 2007 national census, percent of the population of the province is Muslim. Christians make up percent of the population.