

Pastor and 25 Others Slain, Politician Kidnapped in Cameroon

At least 25 people were killed in Cameroon, among them a church leader, as militants carried out two spectacular attacks in the far north of Cameroon at the end of July. In one attack in the town of Kolofata, the wife of the Deputy Prime Minister and her maid were kidnapped, raising fears that the area has become a new battle-field for Nigeria's Islamist group Boko Haram.

In the second attack, Pastor Jean Marcel Kesvere of the Lutheran Brethren Church of Cameroon, was kidnapped. His family found out later he'd been killed.

Recently, regional governments—from Niger, Chad, Cameroon, along with Nigeria—pledged to set up a joint-force to fight the Boko Haram crisis that has spread across all their borders.

But for now the radical sect, responsible for the kidnapping of more 200 school girls in Chibok, continues its deadly killing spree.

About 10 members of security forces were killed in a daring attack, targeting military positions, at Bargaram on Thursday afternoon July 24. This assault, carried out by heavily armed men, lasted until July 25. An unknown number of people were abducted, among them Pastor Jean Marcel Kesvere. His decomposed body was found on the evening of July 28 in a bush near the small town of Kamouna, 7 km (4.3 miles) from Bargaram.

Kesvere, 45, was born in Cameroon, trained in neighboring Chad and was sent back to Bargaram by the Lutheran Brethren Church,

where he served for more than two years. He is survived by his wife and eight children.

Kesvere's kidnap and assassination has plunged the Christian community into shock. "We are in great pain for the loss of a colleague devoted to his ministry" says a church member, whose identity cannot be disclosed for security reasons. He did not know why Kesvere suffered such a fate.

According to local sources, the second attack in the area was particularly violent and well planned. Hundreds of militants wearing Cameroonian army uniforms stormed the town of Kolofata, about 5 km (about 3 miles) from Nigeria's border, early Sunday morning July 27, shelling indiscriminately and looting homes.

The assailants targeted the residence of Amadou Ali, the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of parliamentary relations, who'd arrived earlier in his home town to celebrate the end of Ramadan. Mr Ali was not present during the attack but his wife and her maid were abducted, along with the influential local community and religious leader, the Sultan of Kolofata, Seiny Boukar Lamine, his wife and their five children.

In total, about 22 people were missing and their whereabouts is still unknown. The assailants also targeted the hospital, apparently in search of two workers of Western origin. But the foreign employees were on holiday, our local source added. At least 18 civilians and members of security forces were killed. Local sources contacted by World Watch Monitor said that the lifeless bodies of the victims were laid along the way to the residence of the Deputy Prime Minister. Some of them, mutilated by machetes, were unidentifiable.

The far north of Cameroon is a vast semi-desert area composed of three provinces (Adamawa, North and Far North), bordered by Nigeria, Chad and the Central African Republic. The region has witnessed a number of abductions targeting expatriates

(missionaries, tourists, workers, etc.) in recent months. Most of them were released after payment of a ransom. But this is the first kidnapping case targeting a Cameroonian church leader.

Since the announcement of the death of Pastor Kesvere, WWM has heard that reactions have come in from all sides—Christians and Muslims—to encourage Christians in the region not to cede to fear, and to stand firm in their faith. Many people, friends and relatives, headed to Maga, Kesvere's birthplace—where his family went to bury him—to give moral and spiritual support.

The Islamist insurgency and Nigeria's military crackdown have pushed thousands to seek refuge in Northern Cameroon. The arrival of thousands fleeing the ongoing inter-communities' violence in the Central African Republic to the south-east has added to the current economic and social pressures in the region. A night curfew (8pm-5am) has been in force in the Far North from mid-May.

Nevertheless on June 7, about 300 heavily armed men attacked the town of Gorsî Tourou, 400 km from Nigeria's border. According to local sources contacted by WWM eight members of local churches were killed and four churches burned down. Dozens of residents, frightened by the attack, sought refuge in neighboring areas, mainly in Maroua, the capital of the Far North of Cameroon.

On May 22-23 unknown gunmen attacked the village of Biboumza, in Touboro area, near the Central African Republic border. According to local sources, four villagers were killed and 56 wounded during the attack. One church and several houses were burned down and food stores were looted by the attackers who also raped a number of women, before making their way across the border.

Security forces sent to the scene the following day could only

assess the scale of the damage. The assailants, suspected to be Fulani Mbororos—close to Séléka—were said to be "avenging" their Muslim brothers under attack from anti-Balaka militia in CAR.

Local communities were already concerned by the rising security issues in their region. In April Christian and Muslim leaders pledged to tackle the rising security issues in the region. A forum is scheduled for August 7, to raise awareness of peaceful cohabitation among youth regardless of their religious backgrounds.

Long accused of being the weakest link in the fight against Boko Haram, Cameroon seems to have decided to wield its muscles. Some 3,000 troops including members of the Rapid Intervention Battalion—Cameroon's elite forces—have been deployed along Nigeria's border said Issa Tchiroma, the Minister of Information and government spokesman, who denounced 'a very nasty aggression' from militants and vowed to fight back. □

"We have mobilized all our security and defense forces and the government will leave no stone unturned in the fighting [against Boko Haram] to bring them down."

Tchiroma admits Boko Haram is not an easy target. "The problem is we are fighting an asymmetric battle.□ Nobody knows who is Boko Haram exactly, they have very much infiltrated here and there, [and] it is impossible to know when they will attack".

The recent deadly attacks seem to be a revenge attack, in retaliation against a heavy verdict pronounced on July 14 against Boko Haram members, by the Special Criminal Court in Maroua. Fourteen militants charged with the illegal possession of firearms and ammunition and of plotting an insurrection were sentenced to up to 20 years in prison.