



Executions, Violent Attacks and Emptying of Villages in Norther Mozambique Lead to a Call for Action

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The cries of babies lying in their dead mothers' blood resound from the video Pastor Paul circulated online as proof of what is happening in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province.

The recent bodies left to rot and the charred churches, schools and homes are reminders of the perils of living in the Northern region of this African country. But the 42-year-old pastor and father of six seems to be a lone voice trying to draw attention to the growing violence in his region that he says is often erratic, sparing some villages while slaughtering others.

Thousands of people are currently fleeing their homes to escape death, and many are seeking shelter in the neighboring villages where the pastor is responsible for shepherding 21 churches, said the pastor, whose name has been changed to protect his identity.

Militants or insurgents connected to the Islamic State group (IS) have plagued the region since 2017, killing thousands and sending hundreds of thousands from their homes, national media outlets calculated after a violent streak of outbreaks in 2021.

And watchdog groups who track Christian persecution around the world, such as Open Doors, show Mozambique's Northern province can be a dangerous place to live, especially for Christians, fraught with threats of death, abduction and execution.

These predictions have become increasingly true with the onslaught of attacks in February and early March that seem to be targeted specifically at Christians, Pastor Paul said, leaving his congregants shaken that they could be next.

“They tell villagers we don’t want to find you worshipping Jesus,” Pastor Paul said through an interpreter, explaining what people have told him when the insurgents spare a village.

So far, Pastor Paul has calculated that the insurgents, commonly known as Al-Shabab to villagers, vandalized and burned 41 churches and 18 schools in February in 13 villages in the district of Chiure.

Yet, according to the insurgents' own count, his figures only captured a fraction of the violence. On the Islamic State’s media center, I’lam Foundation, they claim to have burned nearly 500 Christian homes, churches and government buildings and killed or injured 70 Mozambique army soldiers and Christians in 27 separate attacks over the last 52 days.



The attacks, the I’lam Foundation boasts, have led to large economic losses, crusader international companies forced to stop working and mass displacement of Christians from their villages.

Also, children have been displaced from their parents, and starvation is rampant in at least four villages that Pastor Paul knows of. That is why the pastor began reporting on the attacks and sending the information along with videos and photos to his Christian partners in the US.

The advocacy he hopes will lead to government intervention, which he says has been sparse, and as a call for action for Christians around the world to pray.

“We pray for courage so the Christians who are terrified won’t run away. So we ask for prayers for courage and faith to be made strong,” he said. “That we remain even when it’s hard.”

Pastor Paul also asked for prayer that the believers in his churches would share what little they have. He has already witnessed countless acts of sacrifice as believers have opened their

homes and shared what little food and clothes they have. And the churches are open for people to stay as well.

“They are running from other villages without anything, without clothes, without anything. It’s hard to provide for them,” he said through a translator. “The believers, they receive them. They encourage them, and they cry with them.”

In the neighboring province of Nampula, ministers who work with refugees estimate they have received 30,000 refugees escaping the persecution in Cabo Delgado’s province.

Mozambique’s population is roughly 34 million people, and Open Doors estimates 56 percent of the population is Christian. Yet Christians in the north are increasingly being limited due to attacks by violent Islamic militants, drug trafficking, government restrictions and Christians targeted for their faith, a 2024 Open Doors report concluded. Women are especially vulnerable and are targets for human trafficking and forced marriages.

Since Pastor Paul started collecting reports, family and friends have sent him videos and pictures, and he’s collected images from the Islamic State’s media center, I’lam Foundation.

One of the most violent videos he received at the beginning of March shows what appears to be young people laughing as they hold the necks of four captives lined up in a row and then reach for machetes and behead them.

Another video captures hundreds of people fleeing their village. Women carry heavy bundles on their heads, clutching children’s hands while babies are tied behind them in sheets. The elderly use walking canes. A few pass by on motorcycles.

Another video captures dozens of dead villagers sprawled in groups. Children lie close to their fathers and mothers. All except the babies strapped to their mothers’ backs are dead.

“We don’t understand why this is happening,” Pastor Paul said. “The truth is it’s terrifying. It’s a big fear, but for believers, they also know they have a God, and they are following their Savior who died like that.”

Yet even in their grief, God is growing Pastor Paul’s ministry in unbelievable ways, he said. What started as a class for children to learn about Jesus on Saturdays five years ago has grown from about 300 children to attracting thousands each week.

Parents who flee from their villages hear about their ministry and that the children are fed, so they send them, which is how the program is now reaching thousands, he said.

“The number has increased beyond our expectations,” he said. “We can see a big change in the kids that are being reached, and they are telling their parents, and the parents are going to church as a result of hearing from their kids.”

On March 2, a video captures the children seated in rows on the dirt floor filling every corner of the church — young people open the word and read. Children line the walls with colorful bowls filled with rice and beans.

Then, one of the leader's voices booms as he leads the children in a chant.

"We love the Lord. We love the Lord," their voices thunder.