

Kenya: Freedom of religion or belief

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Introduction

Violations of freedom of religion or belief in Kenya are primarily perpetrated by members and sympathisers of the Somali terrorist group al Shabaab. The al Hijra faction of al Shabaab consists predominantly of East Africans, most them reportedly Kenyan nationals.

Since October 2011 the group has perpetrated attacks on churches, security installations and villages. The areas of the country that border Somalia have experienced the majority of the attacks. In 2014 the Anglican Church made the decision to close down their church in Mandera, after a significant number of the congregants were killed in a series of attacks by the terror group.

In 2015 al Shabaab killed at least 147 people, most of them students, at Garissa University. The attackers reportedly singled out Christian students for execution. The massacre in Garissa led to calls for the removal of refugee camps occupied by Somalis. It was the fourth attack in which al Shabaab terrorists had separated hostages according to religious identity and murdered them accordingly. The previous occurrences were:

- September 2013: Siege at Westgate shopping mall.
- November 2014: Hijacking of a bus travelling from Mandera to Nairobi.
- December 2014: Attack on a quarry in Mandera.
- The coastal town of Mombasa has witnessed several church attacks and the murders of three clergymen since 2013, including the killing on 14 February 2014 of Lawrence Kazungu Kadenge, an assistant pastor at Glory of God Ministries Church.

Escalation in attacks

From May 2017 al Shabaab ramped up its attacks in Kenya. Over 50 people have been killed and many more injured in ambushes or by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Garissa, Mandera, and Lamu. Several have been abducted, only to be killed later. On 31 May 2017 around 70 terrorists invaded Fafi town in Garissa County, destroying a telecommunications mast, killing a Christian school teacher as she taught a class, and abducting a male Christian teacher. He was later found dead, along with a Muslim teacher who had tried to assist him and had also been abducted.

On 5 and 6 September 2017 four men were beheaded and several homes were raided by suspected members of al Shabaab, in the villages of Silini-Mashambani and Bobo, both in Lamu County. The men who attacked Bobo reportedly called out residents by name, surrounding the village and preventing inhabitants from fleeing. One resident informed Kenyan media that the attackers were not afraid of being caught: "They were taking their time. When they spoke, they

didn't do it in hushed tones as someone afraid of being heard would. They spoke in normal tones. They ransacked houses and took what they wanted before killing."

On 18 August 2017 the group had carried out similar raids on Maleli Village in Lamu County, where at least three men were beheaded and several houses torched; and on Jima and Pandanguo Villages, also in Lamu County, where nine men were killed on 7 July. These attacks occurred a matter of days after three officers were killed in an attack on a police post in another nearby village. In September 2017 two police officers were shot dead near the city of Mombasa as they protected the St Pauls Ukunda Church belonging to the Anglican Church of Kenya.

Al Shabaab is reported to have set up permanent training bases in the Boni forest in mid-2012. Although the area is now surrounded by three army bases, according to a member of the local community the group continued to cause "untold suffering" and was "having a field day inside the forest without any fear of the soldiers and the police." In October 2017 the Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF) in Lamu and Garissa Counties intensified Operation Linda Boni, which is designed to destabilise and clear al Shabaab militants from their hideouts in the Boni forest. The October offensive was initially successful; however, the attacks carried out by the group increased at the end of the year.

- In November 2017 two police vehicles were burned as security operatives escorting commercial buses along the main road between Mandera and Nairobi came under attack.
- On 27 December 2017 a lorry driver and his passenger were shot and killed on the Lamu-Garsen road by suspected al Shabaab militants. The assailants burned the lorry and bombed an electricity pylon.
- On 30 December 2017 Kenyan newspapers reported that 50 al Shabaab militants had attacked Ijara Police Station in Garissa County. No one was killed, but the police station was burned down and a police vehicle was stolen. The attackers also destroyed a communications mast using a rocket-propelled grenade, and looted a shop before razing it to the ground. On 31 December 2017 five suspected militants were killed and police recovered five AK-47 rifles, 13 magazines with 370 rounds of ammunition, two grenades and bomb-making materials.
- Five security personnel were killed in a suspected al Shabaab attack on 2 January 2018. Two administration police officers and three police reservists were attacked

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on the Ellwak-Kotulo road in Mandera as they carried out regular patrols. A group of highly trained police officers from the General Service Unit (GSU) was also ambushed as they responded to the attack. Although no officers were killed, their vehicle was burned out.

- On 13 January 2018, 50 suspected al Shabaab militants attacked police officers escorting passenger buses near Nyongoro, in Lamu County. A 35-year-old mother was shot dead and five police officers were severely injured and transferred to local hospitals.
- On 16 February 2018 al Shabaab attacked a primary school in Wajir County killing two male Christian teachers and the wife of one of the teachers. The attack led to an exodus of non-local teachers, which has left 224 primary schools and 42 secondary schools in the county unable to function.
- Four businessmen were killed at a quarry in the Shimbir Fatuma area in Mandera town on 4 May 2018. The men were reported to be non-locals, and authorities blamed al Shabaab for the attack.
- Nine Kenyan soldiers were killed by al Shabaab on 6 May 2018 on the Kenya-Somalia border, when their vehicle ran over an IED.
- On 17 June 2018 five administrative police officers and three police reservists were killed when their vehicle hit an IED in the Bojigaras area of Wajir County. Similarly, on 8 August five soldiers were killed when their vehicle made contact with an IED in Lamu County. Al Shabaab reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack.
- On 12 September two Muslim men were killed at Kilolapwa and Shamu villages in Ukunda, Kwale County. Imam Ali Hassan Chisuse, 58, the chairman of the mosque, was shot three times at around 8pm as he closed the door of the Masjid Irshad mosque, while Mwinyi Pataka, 70, was killed in his home in Shamu by assailants who escaped on a motorcycle. While some observers speculated the killings were political, others state that the coordinated nature of the attacks, coupled with the imam's vocal opposition to radicalisation, pointed to a hit by al Shabaab.
- On 14 September two people were killed after failing to recite the Muslim profession of faith and seven Qur'anic verses, when seven Al Shabaab militants stopped and racially profiled passengers in a bus at Handaro near Garissa.

Recommendations

- Urge the government of Kenya to redouble efforts to clear the Boni forest and surrounding areas of al Shabaab fighters, and increase the numbers of security personnel deployed to the coastal region to protect civilians.
- Strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation and support for Kenya, with a particular focus on Lamu and Garissa Counties.
- Assist the Kenyan government in meeting the humanitarian needs of communities displaced or affected by al Shabaab violence in Lamu and Garissa Counties.
- Conduct coordinated assessments with the governments of Somalia and Kenya of the al Shabaab counter-terrorism strategy and its potential impact on civilians in both countries.

As Christians, we stand with everyone facing injustice because of their religion or belief.