



THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS

August 2024



Democratic Republic of the Congo
FORWARD
THROUGH THE FIRE

PHOTO ISSUE



“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” Heb 13:3



The Joy of Those Who Have Lost

This Newsletter, our 2024 photo issue, is a powerful testament to the joy of the Lord, which transcends the fallen world's worst circumstances of suffering and loss.

Tens of thousands of our Christian brothers and sisters in the northeastern border region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are suffering. They have lost homes, farms, livestock, churches and family members. Safety, security and even dignity have been taken away from them, but because of their eternal hope in Christ, they have a joy and peace that their attackers cannot destroy.

The Islamists who are attacking our Christian family in the DRC are experiencing another kind of suffering. They are lost. Committing murder and sexual assault in the name of a false religion. Without peace or joy. Facing an eternity apart from God, in Hell.

Beware of anyone who tries to convince you that being faithful to God eliminates suffering in this world. That idea negates the obedient sacrifices of God's faithful servants throughout Scripture, all other martyrs throughout church history and, most important, Jesus Christ our Lord. For the eternally significant joy that was set before him, he bore the fallen world's temporal suffering on the cross (Hebrews 12:2). Our Lord suffered obediently instead of being delivered from the pain (Luke 22:42), and in many situations throughout our lives, we are called to do the same. Suffering well, for God's glory, is what it means to be like Christ.

Everything we do at VOM is meant to fulfil our calling to bring you into fellowship with our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters. We bring you their true testimonies of faith so you will be inspired by their exemplary faith and remember them (Hebrews 13:3), understanding their plight as if you were in their place. This kind of understanding always leads us to pray for them, and then the Lord directs each of us as to how we might serve them.

In short, we seek to see God's will done on earth as it is in heaven. Every person you meet through this newsletter, and thousands of others in the DRC, will be united just as *"they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee..."* (Christ's high priestly prayer, John 17:21). As we display unity of love and fellowship with persecuted members of Christ's body who have suffered, we are a powerful witness to the lost — including the persecutors who attack them. Christ prayed that we would be *"I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."* (John 17:23).

May this newsletter play a part in making that prayer come true.

Ashley

About the cover: Providing help to Christians in the DRC is having an effect on the lost. When a community learned that the church was going to help, they said, "What can the church provide?" They had only ever seen the NGOs doing any kind of humanitarian help for the suffering. People were quite shocked to see churches working together to help those in need.



An Opportunity for New Growth Amid Ongoing Threats

Beneath the lush green canopy of rainforest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) lie abandoned homes and entire villages being reclaimed by the jungle. Their former occupants, millions of Congolese, have been forced to flee attacks from the more than 100 armed militant groups that have terrorized the region for several decades. While the DRC is predominantly Christian, Islam is a growing influence, and some of the militant groups hold to Islamist beliefs. One such group is the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which is active in the northeastern DRC. The ADF has openly stated its intent to eradicate Christians and establish Islamic law throughout the region. But Christian leaders say the country's youthful population, with a median age of about 16, provides fertile soil for advancement of the Gospel.



The Cross Is Everything

In early 2023, ADF militants attacked a Pygmy village in the eastern DRC where Moses and Marie Bayaga lived. Five of the couple's adult sons were killed in the attack. "They were shooting guns here and there," Moses said, "finding the children and the men and killing them with knives and machetes." Survivors of the attack fled their forest homes and took refuge in a camp for internally displaced people. But even in these camps, Pygmies often face discrimination because of their relatively small stature. When some Christians near Moses and Marie's camp met the couple, they began providing them with food and supplies, and they also shared the Gospel with them. While Pygmies generally hold to traditional, animistic beliefs, Moses and Marie welcomed the Christians' Good News. "Through all these struggles, we came to understand that the cross is everything," Moses said. "God is the one who can provide and give help."

Giving the Pain to Christ

Luce Ibara's village was raided by ADF militants in August 2022. The attackers killed some villagers and abducted others, including her 12- and 18-year-old daughters. Luce hasn't heard from her daughters since their abduction and fears they have been killed. During the attack, she and her husband, a church leader, ran for their lives, leaving everything they owned behind. Luce is grateful for a replacement Bible she received during her first visit to an aid distribution centre, sponsored by VOM and a local church. "My faith in Christ is very strong, and that is what carried me through the bitterness, pain and wounds," she said. "I have just given that pain and bitterness to Christ, and He is the one who has sustained me."





I Can Smile

Kimboti, her eight children and a pregnant neighbour were marched deep into the forest after ADF militants abducted them from their village in 2022. Kimboti thought they would all be killed, but after two days a guard suddenly set them free and told them to run. They ran for hours, with older children carrying younger siblings, frequently passing the bodies of people killed by the ADF. Kimboti now lives in a camp with many other displaced people who regularly receive aid from the global body of Christ. "Now I am happy, and I can smile," one aid recipient said. "I have food to feed my children, and that makes my heart filled with peace."



Forward After the Fire

When survivors found an 8-year-old girl in the ashes of a burned church, they named her "Divine Grace" because it was a miracle she had survived. The girl's parents died in the fire, which was set by militants during an August 2022 attack on their Christian village. Most medical personnel expected the 8-year-old to die too; burns covered 48% of her body. But the Christians who pulled her from the ashes prayed for her and looked for a doctor willing to help her. The doctor who agreed to treat her, Justin Mandaboy, said he believes God intervened to help her survive six major surgeries. "It is pretty easy to treat her because she is courageous," he said, "and she has a lot of strength. I have a lot of faith for her in the future."



Hope for Living

Militants in the DRC frequently abduct and abuse both women and men. Front-Line Workers estimate that 40% of Congolese women and 24% of men have been victims of sexual violence. Margurette (pictured above) was taken into the jungle by ADF fighters and forced to watch as they killed her two brothers with machetes. Although she eventually escaped, the trauma left her unable to speak. But six months of spiritual care and encouragement from other Christians who had suffered for their faith have helped her recover. "God has given me hope for living," she said.

God's Word Heals Wounds of War

The Congolese mountain village of Tchabi has suffered unimaginable violence. When ADF militants launched a series of attacks starting in May 2019, they set fire to dozens of homes and buildings; destroyed a school, a church and a hospital; and ultimately murdered 182 people. Years later, villagers who had fled the area began to return and rebuild their lives. They also restored the village's church building, where Front-Line Workers distributed Bibles while ministering to the villagers' emotional and spiritual wounds. "It touched my heart knowing how to forgive our enemies," said the town's chief, whose wife was killed in the attack.



Sending Forth a New Generation

A small airplane landed on the village's remote runway, a notable event because it was the first to do so in years. As the plane's precious cargo was unloaded and distributed, villagers broke into a spontaneous, joyous parade.

With help from the global body of Christ, our Congolese brothers and sisters move forward in hope — through the fire — as they bear witness to Christ at any cost.



Prayer Diary

August/September 2024

AUGUST

S	18	COMOROS	Pray for Bible translators who are working to make God's Word available in native languages.
M	19	VIETNAM	Pray for Hmong Christians who experience some of the most violent and harsh forms of persecution.
T	20	SRI LANKA	Pray for Front-Line Workers like Malamma who are boldly leading many to faith in Christ.
W	21	MALAYSIA	Pray for Christians who have been tortured in re-education camps for refusing to return to Islam.
T	22	SAUDI ARABIA	Pray for Christians who worship together secretly without church buildings.
F	23	MALI	Pray for Christian converts from Islam who often face harassment from family members and their communities.
S	24	KYRGYZSTAN	Pray that Believers will "shine as lights" by living with integrity amid widespread corruption (Philippians 2:14–16).
S	25	SUDAN	Pray for Front-Line Workers responding to crisis situations in conflict areas.
M	26	BHUTAN	Pray that Christians who lose their livelihood because of their faith will experience God's provision in a special way.
T	27	TAJKISTAN	Pray that God's Word, which is available only in some cities, will become accessible in new ways.
W	28	COLOMBIA	Pray that Front-Line Workers distributing Bibles in the "red zones" will be undetected by rebel groups.
T	29	NIGER	Pray for Christians who have been attacked by Islamists from neighbouring countries.
F	30	INDONESIA	Pray for the successful distribution of Bibles in areas of heavy persecution.
S	31	ERITREA	Pray for the salvation of the country's leader, Isaias Afwerki, who studied in Communist China.

SEPTEMBER

S	1	YEMEN	Pray that Christians without access to regular fellowship will grow in their faith and find encouragement.
M	2	CUBA	Pray for new ways to get printed Bibles into the country and alleviate the current shortage.
T	3	PAKISTAN	Ask the Lord to provide for and encourage impoverished Pakistani Christians who are trapped in indentured servitude.
W	4	UGANDA	Pray that Christian converts from Islam will remain firm in their faith when persecuted by their family and community.
T	5	SOUTHERN MEXICO	Pray for God's protection and blessing on a husband-wife team of Front-Line Workers.
F	6	NORTH KOREA	Pray for the wisdom and discernment of North Korean Christians as they practice their faith under heavy scrutiny.
S	7	INDIA	Pray that Front-Line Workers will be able to share the Gospel among India's large Muslim population.
S	8	TURKEY	Pray for Mustafa and Nazli as they prepare to train for ministry in their church.
M	9	NIGERIA	Pray for Pastor Emmanuel and his wife, Ladi, who were abducted by Islamists and later released.
T	10	BRUNEI	Of the 9% who are Christians in Brunei, nearly all are ethnically Chinese. Pray that they will work to reach Muslims.
W	11	LIBYA	Pray that Libyans will be won to Christ through Anita Smith's message of forgiveness toward her husband's killers.
T	12	PHILIPPINES	Pray for a Holy Spirit-empowered vision and drive to reach Muslims for Christ.
F	13	NEPAL	Pray for churches that have been displaced or are having difficulty worshiping due to opposition.
S	14	MOROCCO	Pray for the strength and encouragement of families of imprisoned Christians.

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