

# Today's Martyrs

*Resources for understanding current Christian witness and martyrdom*

## Weekly Report – 2017-04-02 through 2017-04-08



### Central African Republic

Fr Aurelio Gazzera OCD (**UPDATE:** said "...a group of former Seleka rebels entered the village, ransacking homes, and the two missions in the area, that of the Capuchin Fathers and that of the Polish religious of the Sisters of Divine Charity of Saint Giovanna Antida Thouret. There seems to have been at least four deaths. Thanks to the intervention of MINUSCA [UN Mission in Central Africa] the militiamen withdrew...Some of our mission nuns who were going to the border with a van found the road blocked by thirty armed men, who forced them to follow them as they entered the village...This is a small village which lies at the border of the Central African Republic with Chad and Cameroon, in the extreme northwest of the Country... The sisters told me that the bandits were well armed, but were not molested ...Until substantial forces of MINUSCA peacekeepers and soldiers of the regular army are deployed, the north-west border area will remain in the hands of various armed groups created by former Seleka and their anti-Balaka rivals")

Date: April 4, 2017

Location: Ngaoundaye

Source: <http://www.fides.org/en/news/62078->

[AFRICA CENTRAL AFRICA The Catholic missions of Ngaoundaye have been at tacked the bandits fled at the arrival of the Blue Helmets#.W0cStvkrKM8](#)



### China

Li Hongmin (husband of Xu Lei, criminally detained on [June 6, 2016](#) on 'illegal business operations' charges for printing religious literature; **UPDATE:** convicted, sentenced to 10 months' imprisonment and fined US\$1,4510, will be released with time served)

Date: March 27, 2017

Location: Guangzhou, Guangdong province

Source: <http://www.chinaaid.org/2017/03/christian-handed-10-month-sentence-for.html>



## Colombia

Bishop Victor Manuel Ochoa Cadavid (has begun steps to aid refugees fleeing from Venezuela)

Date: March 27, 2017

Source: [http://www.fides.org/en/news/62066-AMERICA\\_COLOMBIA\\_The\\_help\\_of\\_the\\_Catholic\\_Church\\_to\\_those\\_fleeing\\_from\\_Venezuela#.WOTzV28rKM8](http://www.fides.org/en/news/62066-AMERICA_COLOMBIA_The_help_of_the_Catholic_Church_to_those_fleeing_from_Venezuela#.WOTzV28rKM8)



## Congo, Democratic Republic

Fr Charles Mukubayi (said “Militiamen sacked and torched the Bishop’s House and offices, offices connected with Catholic schools, homes for novices and premises for formation, they also desecrated St John’s Cathedral. Then they went on to Lunkelu where they sacked the propedeutic seminary...the priests had to flee to the forest for safety. They risk being killed if they come out”)

Date: March 31, 2017

Location: Luebo, Kasai region

Source: [http://www.fides.org/en/news/62051-AFRICA\\_RD\\_CONGO\\_Fresh\\_attacks\\_on\\_Catholic\\_church\\_property\\_in\\_Kasai\\_Pope\\_Francis\\_says\\_pray\\_for\\_peace\\_in\\_DR\\_Congo#.WOOWxW8rKM8](http://www.fides.org/en/news/62051-AFRICA_RD_CONGO_Fresh_attacks_on_Catholic_church_property_in_Kasai_Pope_Francis_says_pray_for_peace_in_DR_Congo#.WOOWxW8rKM8)



## Egypt

Bishop Asheiya (wrote “The Copts of Naja Rizq Shenouda have suffered since 1971 on account of the refusal of the local authorities to grant them a permit to build a church on a 618sq.m plot of land owned by the Church and officially registered as Church property. There is no church in the hamlet which is home to some 3,500 Copts, the Copts worship in a rundown building — if it can be termed ‘building’ — that has no ceiling and thus no privacy and is moreover unshielded against weather conditions”)

Youssef Sidhoum (editor of the Coptic newspaper al-Watani; **UPDATE:** wrote that the church building license was referred to provincial security by the governor in January 2017 in violation of the 2016 Law for Building and Restoring Churches)

Date published: April 2, 2017

Location: Naja Rizq Shenouda hamlet, Tahta district, Sohag province

Source: <http://www.copticsolidarity.org/2017/04/02/law-for-building-and-restoring-churches-trouble-in-sohag/>

Fawzia (widow of Bahgat William Zakhar, later described her husband's murder by ISIL “They didn’t even run [after shooting him]. They did not care about being caught by security forces. They were extremely confident. They killed my husband in broad daylight and walked off”, later fled her home)

Marcos (aged 17, son of Bahgat William Zakhar, received a phone call days after his father's murder from ISIL threatening his life, fled his home)

Date: February 12, 2017

Location: el-Arish, Sinai

Masiq (aged 58, husband of Magda, **killed** by ISIL)

Magda (aged 52, widow of Masiq, mother of three sons, fled her home, said after his murder “The security forces are doing what they can but it is not enough. They are just as targeted as we are and are too scared to intervene. When a bomb goes off in Arish and we call the security forces to come, most of the time there is an ambush waiting for them. The militants appear out of nowhere. It’s a war zone and we are all being hunted”, may have to return home despite death threats against her eldest son)

Date: May 2016

Location: el-Arish, Sinai

George (aged 62, husband of Sabreen, threatened by ISIL with death, in hiding, said “We still don’t feel safe here. ISIL know exactly where we are. The security forces are suffering even more than we are: they are also being slaughtered”)

Sabreen (aged 53, wife of George, in hiding, three friends killed by ISIL)

Date reported: April 3, 2017

Location: el-Arish, Sinai

Source: <http://www.copticsolidarity.org/2017/04/03/they-called-my-husband-an-infidel-and-killed-him/>



## France

Pastor Gilbert Leonian (husband, church pelted with stones on **March 25, 2017**, interphone damaged; **UPDATE**: church and home subjected to an arson attack, not injured, said the attack was "a surprise in such a quiet neighborhood")

Date: April 2, 2017

Location: Alfortville

Source: [http://evangelicalfocus.com/cities/2448/Evangelical\\_church\\_attacked\\_near\\_Paris](http://evangelicalfocus.com/cities/2448/Evangelical_church_attacked_near_Paris)

Pastor Fabien Boinet (church heavily damaged by arson, said the attack was a “shock, but I hope that it helps to unite us even more”)

Date: July 12, 2016

Location: Calais

Source: [http://evangelicalfocus.com/cities/1787/Evangelical\\_church\\_burnt\\_in\\_France](http://evangelicalfocus.com/cities/1787/Evangelical_church_burnt_in_France)

Pastor Alain Denizou (described an arson attack on his church)

Date: May 19, 2016

Location: Manosque, Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur

Source: [http://evangelicalfocus.com/europe/1633/Evangelical\\_church\\_in\\_France\\_set\\_on\\_fire](http://evangelicalfocus.com/europe/1633/Evangelical_church_in_France_set_on_fire)



## Greece

Metropolitan Ignatius Georgakopoulos (aged 61, said that the country was heading for catastrophe because it will have only 8 million people by 2030 due to abortion, social immaturity, devaluation and belittling of motherhood and the family, false prosperity, and relativism: "Financial incentives are certainly necessary, but the long experience of the Church shows that the demographic problem has its basis primarily in spiritual causes")

Date reported: April 3, 2017

Location: Athens

Source: <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/102412.htm>



## Indonesia

Rasnius Pasaribu (church secretary; **UPDATE**: said "Such protests [against their new church construction] challenge our efforts to maintain diversity. No matter what. We will celebrate Holy Week in a shophouse where we have been holding Sunday services. We will work with police and local people to guard the celebrations")

Date reported: April 7, 2017

Location: North Bekasi, near Jakarta, West Java

Rev Abdi Saragih (**UPDATE**: said of Holy Week celebrations "We have no other place [to meet other than their closed building]. We will hold the celebrations in the house even though there might be protests...It is not easy being a Christian. Carrying a cross is our task")

Date reported: April 7, 2017

Location: Bogor, West Java

Tyas Utomo (parish council deputy chairman, said Holy Week celebrations will be in a tent "as this is the only facility we have...We cannot guarantee that Easter celebrations will be safe as there is potential threat")

Date reported: April 7, 2017

Location: Parung Panjang

Source: <http://www.ucanews.com/news/indonesian-christians-wary-of-easter-protests/78879>



## Iraq

**Event: The leaders of one Orthodox and two Catholic churches signed an agreement to join together to support the rebuilding of the Christian presence in the country in the form of 12,000 new homes**

Archbishop Timotheus Mousa Shamani (**UPDATE:** said "Today we are truly a united Church - Syriac Orthodox, Chaldean and Syriac Catholic - united in the work of rebuilding these houses on the Nineveh Plains and in restoring hope to the hearts of the inhabitants of these villages and inviting those who have left them to return...We would like to thank Aid to the Church in Need, which has helped us so much in the past, by providing help and food. Now this charity is playing a crucial role in the rebuilding of our houses")

Archbishop Yohanna Petros Moshe (**UPDATE:** said "I would like to invite the Christians of the Nineveh Plains to return to their homes and resume living in their villages, in order to bear witness to Christianity. Today we join together to demonstrate that we are united in our wish to accelerate this operation as rapidly as possible, and that it must start as soon as possible")

Bishop Michael Pola Muqadissi (**UPDATE:** said "Today we have given our agreement to the rebuilding of the houses in our ruined villages. This is a brave step forward which gives us great joy and encourages the Christians to remain in their villages and in their own country")

Archbishop Nicodemus Daoud Sharaf (**UPDATE:** said "We are the roots of Christianity. We must remain in our country. We must remain as witnesses to Jesus Christ in this country, in Iraq and especially in the Plains of Nineveh. This task of rebuilding all the houses in those villages where ISIS has destroyed everything is truly an enormous challenge. Thank you in advance to all those who will help us")

Fr Andrzej Halemba (head of the Middle East department of Aid to the Church in Need; **UPDATE:** said "What we have done to support this initiative, we have not done for money. We have done it to ensure that the Christians can remain in Iraq. We are working for God")

Date: March 27, 2017

Location: Erbil, Kurdistan

Source: <http://members4.boardhost.com/acnaus/msg/1490933423.html>  
and <http://www.aina.org/news/20170331121555.htm>

Sr Habiba Bihnam Toma OP (**UPDATE:** spoke of the 2014 ISIL takeover of her town and the aftermath "We heard the sound of gunshots. We were afraid, cried, prayed and moved slowly among the thousands of people crouching to the ground to avoid the bullets and yelling, 'Where are you, O God? Why have you abandoned us?' It was a shock to leave

the walls of our convent and see the streets full of cars and people, all doing as we were doing, leaving our [homes] out of fear for our lives. The main road was filled with cars and people walking that we could not continue. We abandoned the road for unused path...Finally, all of the sisters arrived at the convent. [We] numbered 75 living in a building meant to hold 20...All day we visited [the refugees], listened to their suffering, encouraged them to be patient, wait in hope and strength of their faith. Everyone was suffering because ISIS destroyed not only our homes and schools but our churches and monasteries and all the landmarks of our 2,000-year-old Christian culture")

Date: March 29, 2017

Location: Springfield, Illinois, United States

Source: <http://www.aina.org/news/20170403191212.htm>

Yonadam Kanna (Member of Parliament; **UPDATE:** said “The real estate mafia has struck again. These criminals get counterfeit papers and property deeds to claim assets, houses or businesses owned by Christians forced to leave the country in recent years because of wars and violence...The problem began with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and involved thousands of seized homes and property. With respect to Christians, we are talking about hundreds of homes and businesses")

Date reported: April 4, 2017

Location: Bagdad

Source: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Organised-crime-seizing-Christian-assets-in-Baghdad,-says-Iraqi-lawmaker-40378.html>



## Nigeria

Kwamkur Samuel (Director of Legal and Public Affairs, Christian Association of Nigeria, wrote a letter to the DSS [Department of State Services] protesting the detention of four CAN leaders: “Regrettably, despite assurances from your operatives, led by the Director of Operations, who said that the invitation was only to interact with these distinguished Nigerian Christians and to seek their opinion and advice on how to address the lingering ethno-religious crises in Nigeria, it turned out that the main reason behind the invitation was your interest in the video jingle produced by CAN...to raise funds for the support of the Church and distressed Christians in Nigeria. It was shocking to hear from your establishment that these materials were made to incite violence in response to the attempted annihilation of the Church in Southern Kaduna. With all due respect, such analysis and conclusion were vexatious and very wrong. Unfortunately, you ignored our request while also insisting that the persons invited should report to your Head Office as a matter of extreme urgency, individually and on different dates. The most worrisome and reprehensible aspect of the whole exercise is that these respectable Nigerians, with the exception of General Dogonyaro, were compelled to write statements 'under caution' as if they were common criminals”)

Lt Gen Joshua Dogonyaro retired (CAN leader, interrogated by the DSS)

Justice Kalajine Anigbogu (CAN leader, retired justice, interrogated by the DSS, forced to write a statement)

Mrs Osaretin Demuren (CAN leader, interrogated by the DSS, forced to write a statement)

Mr Tunde Lemo (CAN leader, former Deputy Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria, interrogated by the DSS, forced to write a statement)

Dame Priscilla Kuye (CAN leader, former President of the Nigerian Bar Association, has been scheduled for interrogation by the DSS)

Solomon Asemota (CAN leader, has been scheduled for interrogation by the DSS)

Bosun Emmanuel (CAN leader, has been scheduled for interrogation by the DSS)

Rev Dr Samson Olasupo Ayokunle (CAN President; **UPDATE**: has been scheduled for interrogation by the DSS)

Rev Dr Musa Asake (CAN General Secretary; **UPDATE**: has been scheduled for interrogation by the DSS)

Date reported: April 3, 2017

Source: <http://dailypost.ng/2017/04/03/dss-can-demands-apology-detention-leaders/>



## Mexico

Pastor Chito Aguilar (aged 62, former drug trafficker, said "...eight people walk into a church, one or two will remain at the doors and the others will start collecting watches, rings, wallets...everything. So they become an easy target of the attackers...Seven years ago, the situation was very difficult in Ciudad Juarez. Lots of pastors were kidnapped, their children killed. It seems like for four years we had a period of calm, but in the last year the violence has started increasing again. Pastors are starting to be extorted, leaders threatened with kidnapping, and I believe that among the pastors there is fear because of what we lived and experienced seven or eight years ago")

Adrian Lara (church musician, said "The city of Juarez has been known around the world because the violence has been really hard. Today, in 2017, it's less prevalent. But in 2012, it was very terrible. Every businessman was called by people, who said: 'If you don't pay, we are going to kill your children, or burn your house. We are going to do many things to you if you don't pay'")

Date: April 6, 2017

Location: Ciudad Juarez

Pastor Eduardo Garcia (father of Abraham and Griselda, said "The telephone rang and I heard my wife yell. I was on the second floor, but I heard her cry 'No!' very loudly. So I went downstairs quickly and asked, 'What happened?' And she just said, 'They killed Abraham'...The pain we feel is really strong. We wouldn't wish it on anyone... We had

decided to try to rescue the city, but I never imagined we would become a part of the statistics”)

Abraham Garcia (aged 24, son of Pastor Eduardo Garcia, **killed** by organized criminals)

Date: October 2009

Location: Ciudad Juarez

Pastor Eduardo Garcia (father of Abraham and Griselda; **UPDATE**: paid a ransom to release his daughter)

Griselda (daughter of Pastor Eduardo Garcia, abducted, released after a ransom was paid)

Date: April 2011

Location: Ciudad Juarez

Source: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/04/christians-easy-targets-in-mexicos-lawless-borderlands/>



## Paraguay

Bishop Claudio Gimenez Medina (televised homily cut off by the government after he criticized all political parties and branches of government for the current constitutional crisis)

Date: April 2, 2017

Location: Caacupe

Source: [http://www.fides.org/en/news/62057-AMERICA\\_PARAGUAY\\_The\\_Bishop\\_of\\_Caacupe\\_on\\_the\\_situation\\_The\\_authorities\\_that\\_govern\\_us\\_are\\_the\\_real\\_culprits#.WOT1\\_28rKM8](http://www.fides.org/en/news/62057-AMERICA_PARAGUAY_The_Bishop_of_Caacupe_on_the_situation_The_authorities_that_govern_us_are_the_real_culprits#.WOT1_28rKM8)



## Philippines

Archbishop Socrates Villegas (**UPDATE**: said that although Christians are not persecuted in the country "we have begun to persecute Christian beliefs")

Date reported: April 6, 2017

Source: <http://www.ucanews.com/news/bishop-vows-to-fight-persecution-of-christian-beliefs/78877>



## Russia

Bishop Sergei Ryakhovsky (**UPDATE**: presented a report on the anti-evangelization law at the Council for Interaction with Religious Associations, presented Vladimir Putin assistant Anton Viano with a Bible and the book *Protestants in the Service of Russia*, invited Vaino to visit one of his churches and then said "Now I can be arrested for violating the law of Yarovoy...We are forced to state that by this day we do not know the precedents when new acts of religious legislation would prevent terrorist acts, but there are already more than 100 facts of its illegal use against law-abiding traditional religious associations and individual believers")

Date: March 30, 2017

Location: Moscow

Source: <http://www.christiantelegraph.com/issue28050.html>



## Sudan

**Event: About 20 men attacked and beat Christian women at a church school, then stabbed Christian men who came to their aid**

Younan Abdulla (church elder, husband, father of two young children, stabbed, hospitalized, **died**)

Ayoub Kumama (stabbed, hospitalized, released)

Date: April 3, 2017

Location: Omdurman

Source: <http://morningstarnews.org/2017/04/mob-kills-christian-elder-evangelical-school-sudan-omdurman/>



## Syria

Cardinal Mario Zenari (apostolic nuncio [Vatican ambassador]; **UPDATE**: said "I do not know how to describe these atrocities. I always say, whoever does not believe in hell, just go to [Syria] and it will convey the weight of hell. In Damascus ten days ago we saw on the television, this display, these Kamikaze, seventy dead, forty dead, it is a bloodbath... You should notice more of this suffering of the civilians, especially women and children. It is time to notice and not just read about this but realize it means to do something", added that over 1,000 volunteer aid workers have been killed since fighting began six years ago: "there are also many beautiful examples of altruism")

Date: March 25, 2017

Location: Damascus

Source: <http://www.christiantelegraph.com/issue28038.html>

Archbishop Antoine Audo SJ (**UPDATE:** commented after a nerve gas attack on civilians "In this fragmented situation, with many interests and actors involved, it is difficult to be sure one hundred percent of the way things are. But what we know based on our experience, I just cannot imagine that the Syrian government is so naive and ignorant to be able to do such 'errors'")

Date: April 4, 2017

Location: Khan Shaykun, Idlib province

Source: <http://www.fides.org/en/news/62070->

[ASIA SYRIA Massacre of Idlib Bishop Antoine Audo destabilizing issue and what carries weight are the interests of the forces involved in the war#.WOTxvG8rKM8](http://www.fides.org/en/news/62070-ASIA_SYRIA_Massacre_of_Idlib_Bishop_Antoine_Audo_destabilizing_issue_and_what_carries_weight_are_the_interests_of_the_forces_involved_in_the_war#.WOTxvG8rKM8)



### **Thailand**

Sarafina Sarfaraz (fled [Pakistan](#) on [January 9, 2014](#) after receiving threats to convert to Islam;

**UPDATE:** refugee, has obtained a retirement visa to avoid arrest, cannot afford to renew the visa)

Date: April 7, 2017

Source: <http://www.britishpakistanichristians.org/blog/elderly-asylum-seeker-with-health-conditions-seeks-help-with-cost-of-retirement-visa-in-thailand>



### **United Kingdom**

Archbishop John Sentamu (criticized the National Trust for removing 'Easter' from the Easter Egg Hunt it operates with Cadbury, said "If people visited Birmingham today in the Cadbury World they will discover how Cadbury's Christian faith influenced his industrial output. He built houses for all his workers, he built a church, he made provision for schools. It is obvious that for him Jesus and justice were two sides of the one coin. To drop Easter from Cadbury's Easter Egg Hunt in my book is tantamount to spitting on the grave of Cadbury", Cadbury denied involvement in the removal)

Date reported: April 4, 2017

Location: York

Source: <http://www.itv.com/news/tyne-tees/2017-04-04/archbishop-of-york-in-row-with-cadbury-and-national-trust-over-easter-egg-hunt/>



### **United States - California**

Sandra Palacios (California Catholic Conference associate director for governmental relations, criticized a proposed law that would make it illegal for any church to require its employees to sign an acknowledgement that they would abide by Christian beliefs related to 'reproductive health')

Date: April 3, 2017

Source: <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/how-a-california-bill-is-threatening-faith-based-codes-of-conduct-78338/>

### **United States - Florida**

Marshall Polston (suspended from college on [March 24, 2017](#) after he challenged a Muslim's professor's class statement that Christianity was false and a Muslim student's advocacy of Sharia punishment of homosexuals; **UPDATE**: reinstated after his professor filed a false police report alleging violation of her restraining order against him and he proved with credit card receipts and security video that he was in a restaurant with his grandfather in another town at the time; the professor withdrew her restraining order)

Dates: March 30, 2017 and April 4, 2017

Location: Orlando

Source: <http://www.centralfloridapost.com/2017/03/31/polston-reinstated-after-muslim-professors-claims-debunked-by-rollins/>

and <http://www.christianpost.com/news/muslim-prof-s-lawsuit-against-christian-student-dismissed-by-florida-judge-179707/>

### **United States - Ohio**

Pastor Joseph H McDowell (aged 80, **killed** in his home)

Date: March 28, 2017

Location: Columbus

Source: <http://www.dispatch.com/news/20170328/body-found-after-south-side-house-fire>



### **Venezuela**

#### **Event: Church leaders speak out after the national legislature is dissolved**

Cardinal Jorge Urosa Savino (**UPDATE**: said "The National Assembly is still blocked. I am deeply concerned about the state of emergency in our country regarding poor economic growth which has persisted for the past twelve months. This situation is not normal. Neither are other measures such as the annulment of the revocatory referendum and postponement of elections for governors. This creates a situation of dictatorship")

Cardinal Baltazar Enrique Porras Cardozo (**UPDATE**: said "corrections to sentences are simply cosmetic changes which do not resolve the situation, since they fail to recognize the National Assembly as an autonomous body thus confusing the people. We continue to uphold valid the request made by Cardinal Parolin, last year, to restore the regular function of Parliament... If parliament is to be accused, it must be the people who decide, however at the moment, the real needs of the people are food and medicine")

Date: April 2, 2017

Locations: Caracas and Merida

Source: <http://www.fides.org/en/news/62049->

[AMERICA VENEZUELA Concern for social tension this creates a dictatorship warms Cardinal Urosa Savino#.WON-5m8rKM8](http://www.fides.org/en/news/62049-AMERICA_VENEZUELA_Concern_for_social_tension_this_creates_a_dictatorship_warms_Cardinal_Urosa_Savino#.WON-5m8rKM8)

Bishop Mario del Valle Moronta Rodríguez (**UPDATE**: has begun steps to aid refugees fleeing from Venezuela to Colombia)

Date: March 27, 2017

Source: <http://www.fides.org/en/news/62066->

[AMERICA COLOMBIA The help of the Catholic Church to those fleeing from Venezuela#.WOTzV28rKM8](http://www.fides.org/en/news/62066-AMERICA_COLOMBIA_The_help_of_the_Catholic_Church_to_those_fleeing_from_Venezuela#.WOTzV28rKM8)

## **Today's Martyrs**

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or write to

**2490 Black Rock Turnpike #455**

**Fairfield CT 06825-2400**

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