News



Displaced people sit outside their makeshift shelters April 9 at a camp in Bunia, Congo. Civilians in eastern Congo have been brutalized by militias, rebels and military units. (CNS/Goran Tomasevic, Reuters)

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Aru, Congo — April 10, 2018
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A Catholic priest was shot dead in Congo shortly after celebrating Mass.

U.N. radio in Congo reported April 9 that Father Etienne Nsengiunva, a priest in Kitchanga, was shot at point-blank range April 8.

Father Emmanuel Kapitula, vicar of the parish in Kitchanga, said an armed man entered the room where Nsengiunva was eating with parishioners.

"An armed man entered his house, pointed a gun at him and shot several times, killing him instantly. Those who were sharing the meal ... could not believe it," said Kapitula.

Kapitula has asked the government to protect the people.

''We demand that investigations be done, that culprits be punished," he added.

The murder occurred three days after Father Celestin Ngango of St. Paul Karambi Parish, abducted on Easter, was found, unharmed, by villagers.

Fides, news agency of the Congregation of the Evangelization of Peoples, reported that villagers from Bunyangula found Ngango blindfolded, although he appeared otherwise unharmed. The Congolese bishops' conference told Fides that he would receive standard medical tests as a precaution.

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Local authorities said that ultimately Ngango's release was secured by pressure from the local villagers despite an initial search party turning up no evidence of the priest's whereabouts.

Ngango was the sixth priest abducted in the eastern Congo since 2012 and one of the few abductees in the region to be released. Civilians in eastern Congo have been brutalized by militias, rebels and military units. Thousands of women have been raped by the armed groups. Analysts say competition for mineral resources is the key factor fueling the violence, but recently succession politics added to the troubles.

Challenging what they termed as an "illegal" third term for President Joseph Kabila and recently moving to broker a deal between the government and opposition parties, the Catholic Church has found itself targeted. Churches, convents and Catholic schools have been vandalized or looted by armed groups.