News



U.N. forces from Rwanda patrol the streets of Bangui, Central African Republic, in this Feb. 12 2016 file photo. (AP/Jerome Delay)

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Militants killed a Roman Catholic priest this week in Bangui, the violence-wracked capital of the Central African Republic where Catholic and other faith leaders had made headway recently mediating between factions.

Former members of the mainly Muslim militant group Seleka are accused of killing Fr. Albert Toungoumale–Baba on Tuesday (May 1) at the Notre Dame of Fatima Church. Of the hundreds of worshippers gathered at the church, at least 24 were killed and 170 injured by militants who sprayed bullets into the crowd and detonated grenades.

Toungoumale–Baba is the second Catholic priest to be killed in about a month in the CAR.

The murdered priest's church lies just outside the predominantly Muslim PK5 district of Bangui, where a U.N. peacekeeping force began working last month. The attack on the church is seen as a response to security operations that resulted in the wounding of a leader of a self-defense group that had been accused of terrorizing both Christians and Muslims, said Roman Catholic Bishop Nestor-Desire Nongo-Aziagbia.

The attack on the church Tuesday was followed by attacks on mosques and other Muslim institutions.

Seleka overtook the CAR's central government in March 2013, and was dissolved months later. But ex-Seleka members still hold sway in the CAR, despite U.N. and other efforts to keep the peace. The Catholic Church maintains a high profile in such efforts but has grown uneasy with the killing of a second priest within weeks.

Last month the Fr. Joseph Desire Angbabata, who served in a parish east of Bangui, died of bullet wounds after rebels targeted his church. He had intervened to protect refugees camped at the church compound from the rebels.

In the Congo, Catholic priests are also on alert. One was killed last month, the second in three years.

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