News

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Bishop Osório Citora Afonso of Quelimane, Mozambique, is seen in an undated photo. He was shot dead in his residence "in the early hours" of June 6, 2026, pontifical charity Aid to the Church in Need said in a June 6 press release. (OSV News/Courtesy Mozambique bishops' conference)

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The Catholic Church in Mozambique is mourning the death of Bishop Osório Citora Afonso of Quelimane, who was found shot dead at his residence in the early hours of June 6.

"His body was found in a corridor of the episcopal residence," pontifical charity Aid to the Church in Need said in a June 6 press release. "The perpetrator of the crime remains unknown."

In a statement sent to ACN, Archbishop Inácio Saúre of Nampula, president of the Mozambique bishops' conference, said that the prelate was found "lifeless and in strange circumstances that have yet to be clarified," and appealed for "the serenity of faith and fraternal solidarity" from all in the face of this "sad event."

Citora Afonso, a Consolata missionary, was allegedly shot in the chest, near the heart, ACN said.

The news has left the church in Mozambique "in a state of shock." Saúre said in his statement he received the news "with profound sorrow."

The president of Mozambique also issued a statement expressing his "deep sorrow and consternation" at the news of the bishop's death.

President Daniel Chapo described the loss as "irreparable" for Mozambican society and for the Christian community, noting that Bishop Citora Afonso had "distinguished himself throughout his life by his humility, pastoral dedication, and his preaching of the values of peace and reconciliation."

In Spain, on the first day of his apostolic trip to that country, Pope Leo XIV "learned with sorrow of the grave act of violence" that caused the death of Bishop Citora Afonso, said a statement issued by the Holy See Press Office.

The pope "joins in prayer with the people of the Dioceses and of Mozambique in this hour of distress, that the Lord may grant them consolation, that he may protect each man and woman in his love and stay the hand of the violent," the press office statement said.

Citora Afonso, 54, had also been appointed apostolic administrator of the Archdiocese of Beira, replacing Archbishop Cláudio Zunna, who had resigned April 10 for health reasons.

The murder of the bishop "adds yet another dark cloud over the Church in Mozambique," ACN said, as the country already grapples with "terrorist violence in the north of the country, particularly in Cabo Delgado Province."

CISA News Africa reported that the murder brought "to an abrupt end the life and ministry of one of Mozambique's most promising Church leaders."

The attack comes only a month after a Catholic church in northern Mozambique was targeted in an attack by the Islamic State group that has carried out attacks against Christians and Muslims in the country since 2017.

Extremists attacked the historic St. Louis de Montfort Church in Meza, a town located in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, on April 30.

In April, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom stated that the Islamic State-Mozambique "has carried out a sustained campaign of violence against both Christian and Muslim communities" since 2017.

Over the last two years, the commission said, it has focused its attacks on Christian-majority areas in the Cabo Delgado province, including burning 18 churches in villages in the Chiúre district in 2024, and beheading six Christians in Ancuabe, the same district where the recently destroyed church was located.

In the Diocese of Pemba, repeated attacks on parishes and churches in Cabo Delgado have contributed to a broader pattern of organized destruction of Catholic religious infrastructure, forcing whole Catholic parishes to flee," the commission stated.

Deadly violence against opposition politicians has also shaken Mozambique in recent weeks. While the government has called the incidents isolated cases, opposition and civil society warn of a politically motivated assassination pattern, Deutsche Welle German media reported.

"Mozambique remains a priority country for ACN," said the organization which "has supported the local Church at many levels, not only through humanitarian aid, but also by promoting psychosocial support and the reconstruction of infrastructure."

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This story has been updated to include a statement from the Vatican and to add information about the situation in Mozambique.