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Islamic extremists execute young convert in Somalia

Christian accused of trying to convert Muslim teenager found shot on Mogadishu street

By Simba Tian

Compass Direct (23.11.2009) / HRWF Int. (24.11.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Islamic extremists controlling part of the Somali capital of Mogadishu this month executed a young Christian they accused of trying to convert a 15-year-old Muslim to Christianity.

Members of the Islamic extremist group al Shabaab had taken 23-year-old Mumin Abdikarim Yusuf into custody on Oct. 28 after the 15-year-old boy reported him to the militants, an area source told Compass. Yusuf's body was found on Nov. 14 on an empty residential street in Mogadishu, with sources saying the convert from Islam was shot to death, probably some hours before dawn.

"Our brother Yusuf has been murdered," the source told Compass. "His body was dumped in Yaqshid district of Mogadishu, and his body is said to be on an empty residential street."

Al Shabaab, said to have links with al Qaeda terrorists, controls parts of Mogadishu and much of southern parts of Somalia, as well as other areas of the nation.

Their accusations against Yusuf had led the extremist group to raid Yusuf's home in Holwadag district, Mogadishu, sources said. After searching his home, militia didn't find anything relating to Christianity but still took him into custody.

Before Yusuf was executed by two shots to the head, reports filtered in to the Compass source that he had been badly beaten and his fingers broken as the Islamists tried to extract incriminating evidence against him and information about other Christians. The source later learned that Yusuf's body showed signs of torture; all of his front teeth were gone, and some of his fingers were broken, he said.

"We don't know the time he was murdered, but his freshly killed body was dumped in Yaqshid district at around 4:30 in the morning of Nov. 14, and due to the will of the family we have buried the body at around 3 p.m. on Nov. 14," the source said.

The clandestine Christians could not safely identify themselves to Yusuf's Muslim family, but they were able to indirectly assist the parents in burying him with dignity, the source said.

It is not known whether under torture Yusuf revealed information about area members of the hidden church, but underground church leaders have been relocating local Christians who knew him, the source said.

"We still don't know if the Shabaab did find any new evidence from Yusuf," he said.

Yusuf's Muslim parents did not know that their son was a Christian, and they had insisted to the al Shabaab militants that he was still a Muslim, the source said. The extremists accused the family of not reporting that their son had converted to Christianity, and they ordered his mother and father to appear before an al Shabaab court.

Although the Compass source could not confirm whether the parents heeded the command, he said they most likely did as it is not uncommon for the militants to behead those who defy their orders.

"I cannot confirm if they appeared before the Islamist court, but that is highly possible," he said. "Who can dare defy them?"

The extremists have demonstrated they have no qualms about killing those they perceive to be sympathetic to any "foreign" religion, the source said. He added that the Islamic extremists did not execute Yusuf quickly only because they had no evidence against him except the testimony of the teenage boy.

"In Islam, to execute someone you need to have evidence of three witnesses, and they didn't have it," he said. "Al Shabaab is known to do whatever they like, and they don't even follow the rules of their religion they claim adherence to."

The discovery of Yusuf's body brought an end to a strenuous attempt by his family to secure his release, but they are now living in fear since al Shabaab has accused them of concealing their son's new faith.

The source said Yusuf's death was typical of the Islamic extremist group, which often pumps bullets into their victims before dumping their bodies in public places to serve as a warning to those who dare to resist its orders.

Since the ouster of dictator Siad Barre in 1991, Somalia has been without a strong central government and has been at the mercy of vicious clan-based militants. Some, such as al Shabaab, are seeking to establish a strict version of sharia (Islamic law) as they fight to oust the Transitional Federal Government of President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed that is backed by the Africa Union and Western nations.

Christian in Somalia who refused to wear veil is killed

'Moderate' Islamist group had long suspected woman in Puntland was Christian

By Simba Tian

Compass Direct (27.10.2009) / HRWF Int. (28.10.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net>
- Email: info@hrwf.net - Three masked members of a militant Islamist group in Somalia

last week shot and killed a Somali Christian who declined to wear a veil as prescribed by Muslim custom, according to a Christian source in Somalia.

Members of the comparatively "moderate" Suna Waljameca group killed Amina Muse Ali, 45, on Oct. 19 at 9:30 p.m. in her home in Galkayo, in Somalia's autonomous Puntland region, said the source who requested anonymity for security reasons.

Ali had told Christian leaders that she had received several threats from members of Suna Waljameca for not wearing a veil, symbolic of adherence to Islam. She had said members of the group had long monitored her movements because they suspected she was a Christian.

The source said Ali had called him on Oct. 4 saying, "My life is in danger. I am warned of dire consequences if I continue to live without putting on the veil. I need prayers from the fellowship."

"I was shocked beyond words when I received the news that she had been shot dead," the source in Somalia told Compass by telephone. "I wished I could have recalled her to my location. We have lost a long-serving Christian."

Ali had come to Galkayo from Jilib, 90 kilometers (56 miles) from Kismayo, in 2007. She arrived in Puntland at the invitation of a close friend, Saynab Warsame of the Darod clan, when the Islamic extremist group al Shabaab invaded Kismayo, the source said. Warsame was born in Kismayo and had lived in Jilib but moved to Puntland when war broke out in 1991.

The source said it is not known if even Warsame knew of Ali's conversion from Islam to Christianity.

"She might not have known, because Warsame is not a Christian," he said.

In 1997 Ali, an orphan and unmarried, joined the Somali Christian Brothers' Organization, a movement commonly known as the Somali Community-Based Organization. As such she had been an active member of the underground church in the Lower Juba region.

Muslim extremists have targeted the movement, killing some of its leaders after finding them in possession of Bibles. The organization was started in 1996 by Bishop Abdi Gure Hayo.

Suna Waljameca is considered "moderate" in comparison with al Shabaab, which it has fought against for control over areas of Somalia; it is one of several Islamic groups in the country championing adoption of a strict interpretation of sharia (Islamic law). Along with al Shabaab, said to have links with al Qaeda, another group vying for power is the Hisbul Islam political party. While al Shabaab militia have recently threatened forces of Hisbul Islam in Kismayo, Suna Waljameca has declared war on al Shabaab.

Among Islamic militant groups, Suna Waljameca is said to be the predominant group in Puntland.

It is unknown how many secret Christians there are in Somalia – Compass sources indicate there are no more than 75, while The Economist magazine hedges its estimate at "no more than" 1,000 – but what is certain is that they are in danger from both extremist groups and Somali law. While proclaiming himself a moderate, President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed has embraced a version of sharia that mandates the death penalty for those who leave Islam.

Christian Servants

In 1994 Ali worked with the Belgium contingent of United Nations Operations in Somalia as a translator. The same year she was a translator during a peace conference aimed at bringing together warring clans in the lower Juba region.

Her death follows the murders of several other Christians by Islamic extremists in the past year. Sources told Compass that a leader of Islamic extremist al Shabaab militia in Lower Juba identified only as Sheikh Arbow shot to death 46-year-old Mariam Muhina Hussein on Sept. 28 in Marerey village after discovering she had six Bibles. Marerey is eight kilometers (five miles) from Jilib, part of the neighboring Middle Juba region.

On Sept. 15, al Shabaab militants shot 69-year-old Omar Khalafe at a checkpoint they controlled 10 kilometers (six miles) from Merca, a Christian source told Compass. Al Shabaab controls much of southern Somalia, as well as other areas of the nation. Besides striving to topple President Ahmed's Transitional Federal Government in Mogadishu, the militants also seek to impose a strict version of sharia.

In August al Shabaab extremists seeking evidence that a Somali man had converted from Islam to Christianity shot him dead near the Somali border with Kenya, sources said. The rebels killed 41-year-old Ahmed Matan in Bulahawa, Somalia on Aug. 18.

In Mahadday Weyne, 100 kilometers (62 miles) north of the Somali capital of Mogadishu, al Shabaab Islamists on July 20 shot to death another convert from Islam, Mohammed Sheikh Abdiraman, at 7 a.m., eyewitnesses told Compass. The militants also reportedly beheaded seven Christians on July 10. Reuters reported that they were killed in Baidoa for being Christians and "spies."

On Feb. 21 al Shabaab militants beheaded two young boys in Somalia because their Christian father refused to divulge information about a church leader, according to Musa Mohammed Yusuf, the 55-year-old father who was living in a Kenya refugee camp when he spoke with Compass.

Imprisoned Christian in Somaliland on hunger strike

Convert from Islam jailed for allegedly distributing Christian literature

By Simba Tian

Compass Direct (15.10.2009) / HRWF Int. (16.10.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - A convert from Islam in Somalia's self-declared state of Somaliland has staged a hunger strike to protest his transfer to a harsh prison in a remote part of the country.

Osman Nour Hassan was arrested on Aug. 3 for allegedly providing Christian literature in Pepsi village, on the outskirts of the breakaway region's capital city, Hargeisa. On Sept. 9 authorities transferred him from Hargeisa to Mandere prison, 60 kilometers (37 miles) away - a difficult, week-long trip for visitors that is expensive by Somali standards.

"Hassan is in really terrible shape," a Christian source told Compass. "He is very discouraged."

In August the Muslims who accused Hassan met with his family, also Muslim, and agreed that Islamic teachers, or sheikhs, should go to see him in jail to advise him on Islamic

doctrine. Two sheikhs met him in the police station cell and implored him to stop spreading Christianity. Hassan refused.

"His family together with the sheikhs requested the prison to make his situation more harsh, as a form of punishment, with the hope that he would recant the Christian faith and return to Islam," said the source on condition of anonymity. "So far the family has been silent about Hassan's situation and gives him no support."

Promotion of any religion other than Islam in Somaliland is prohibited, contrary to international standards for religious freedom such as Article 18 of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 5(1-2) of the Somaliland constitution states that Islam is the state religion and prohibits the promotion of any other faith, according to the U.S. Department of State's 2008 International Religious Freedom Report, and Article 313 outlines penalties for Muslims who change their religion.

Authorities have thwarted efforts to secure an attorney for Hassan by insisting that he cannot appeal his sentence, the source said. No Christian has ever tried to address a religious rights violation through the courts in Somaliland, he said.

"He is in need of a lawyer to help him, which seems not forthcoming," he said. "But he cannot be allowed the right to a defense anyway. He feels neglected, so he rejected to eat food to protest the mistreatment."

Local authorities have embarked on a crackdown of underground Christians in the predominantly Muslim area, according to three Somaliland Christians who have fled the country. Several underground Christians have either been killed, arrested or fled their homes as Islamists try to stop the clandestine distribution of Bibles, sources said.

Hassan was accused of providing Christian literature to a village Muslim boy, who later showed it to his family and friends. The boy's Muslim family reported the incident to the police, sources said, leading to the arrest of the 29-year-old Hassan.

"His stand is that he had only one Christian material in his possession for learning purposes and not for spreading the faith," the Christian source said. "Hassan needs a lawyer to advocate for his case, because [for someone who was once Muslim] to practice Christianity in Somaliland or another religion apart from Islam is illegal."

In spite of his discouragement, Hassan recently said he is adhering to Christ.

"I still belong to Jesus," he said. "I know one day I'm sure I will be released, and my physical health is okay, but psychologically I feel very anxious and stressed. Please continue praying for me."

Converts from Islam jailed, pursued in Somalia's breakaway region

Christian natives of Somaliland face opposition from authorities, relatives for sharing faith

By Simba Tian

Compass Direct (16.09.2009) / HRWF Int. (17.09.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - A convert from Islam in Somalia's self-declared state of Somaliland has been jailed for distributing Christian materials, and another is on the run from both family members and police upset over his new faith.

Christian sources said Somaliland native Osman Nour Hassan was arrested on Aug. 3 for providing Christian literature in Pepsi village, on the outskirts of the breakaway region's capital city, Hargeisa.

Promotion of any religion other than Islam in Somaliland is prohibited, contrary to international standards for religious freedom such as Article 18 of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 5(1-2) of the Somaliland constitution states that Islam is the state religion and prohibits the promotion of any other faith, according to the U.S. Department of State's 2008 International Religious Freedom Report, and Article 313 outlines penalties for Muslims who change their religion.

Hassan was accused of providing Christian literature to a village Muslim boy, who later showed it to his family and friends. The boy's Muslim family reported the incident to the police, the sources said, leading to the arrest of the 29-year-old Hassan. He was taken to Hargeisa central police station.

The arrest has upset underground Christians who see it as a muzzle on religious expression. They said other Muslim villagers had received Christian materials from Hassan and took no offense, and that Christian Ethiopian refugees in the area have distributed the same literature without problem.

On Aug. 6, the Muslim family who accused Hassan met with his family and agreed that Islamic teachers, or sheikhs, should go to see him in jail to advise him on Islamic doctrine. Two sheikhs met him in the police station cell and implored him to stop spreading Christianity.

"You are from an Islamic family, and therefore you should not disgrace or paint a bad image of the family," argued one of the sheikhs, according to a source who spoke with Hassan. In response, according to the source, Hassan told them that he had received the Christian materials as educational material for himself and for others who cared to read them, and that Jesus was his Savior.

Convinced that Hassan had truly left Islam, and angered by his defiance, the sheikhs urged authorities to take him to the harsher conditions of a jail in Mandera, 60 kilometers (37 miles) away, but at press time Hassan was still incarcerated in Hargeisa.

"His stand is that he is waiting for the coming of Issa [Jesus], just as the whole world is also waiting," said one neighbor.

Somaliland, which is vying for international recognition as a nation, is bordered by the Gulf of Aden to the north, by Ethiopia to the southwest and by Djibouti to the northwest.

Fleeing Somaliland

Another Somaliland convert to Christianity, Mohamed G. Ali, is on the run from both authorities and family members. Ali has fled to neighboring Ethiopia, but the 27-year-old father of three said this will not be enough to deter relatives who seek to punish him for leaving Islam.

He said relatives previously abducted his wife, who is expected to give birth to their fourth child within the next two weeks, and that they are again looking for ways to kidnap her as well as the children.

The native of Hargeisa said he has already survived several attempts on his life by Muslim fanatics since becoming a Christian in 1998. Family members, close relatives within his tribe, the larger community and local officials have all done him harm, he said.

He first came to Ethiopia in April 2002, subsequently marrying Fatumo Mohamed at the Church of the Nazarene. News of his Christian marriage circulated, preceding him upon his return to Hargeisa; soon after his arrival, he said, Muslim fanatics kidnapped his wife and demolished his house.

Fatumo Mohamed remained captive for several months, later managing to escape and rejoin her husband. For more than three years, as they were displaced from the community and went into hiding, he faced open and official threats. When life became unbearably dangerous, they decided to flee to Ethiopia in August 2005.

Speaking only in general terms to protect loved ones he left behind, Ali said Somaliland authorities were seeking him for reasons related to his Christian faith; other sources confirmed this.

Even after he arrived in Ethiopia, Ali was sought by the Somaliland government, which published a notice on April 11, 2007 displaying his photo in two local Somaliland newspapers, Jamhuuriya and Maandeeq. The notice ordered him to appear before a district court within 30 days, saying failure to do so would result in stiff action being taken against him.

That was just one more episode in a journey of faith that began when he broke his leg in 1996. Receiving treatment in Djibouti, he stayed with a close relative who told Ali the New Testament account of Jesus forgiving an adulterous woman brought for judgment. Amazed at Jesus forgiving the woman, Ali began researching Christianity; three years earlier, he had witnessed the stoning of five young women accused of committing adultery in Hargeisa.

"At that point I failed to see the meaning of compassion in Islam," he said. "Many questions started coming to my mind – that not even a single person in the midst tried to call for compassion for the young ladies. I felt that it could have been even better to kill them with a gun than subjecting them to such inhumane killing."

Ali, who is seeking asylum and has conveyed his security concerns to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, is struggling to meet the basic needs of the family – food, shelter, education and clothing – and he is facing an urgent health concern. For three years he has been living with a bone infection, he said, and the danger of paralysis is rising. Looking worried and frightened, and that without asylum he could lose his family as well as his life.

"I will continue trusting in God's protection, for blessed are those who are persecuted for His sake," he said.

Somali Christian shot dead near Kenya border

Muslim extremists kill convert from Islam they were monitoring

By Simba Tian

Compass Direct (22.08.2009) / HRWF Int. (23.08.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net – Muslim extremists seeking evidence that a Somali man had converted from Islam to Christianity shot him dead Tuesday morning (Aug. 18) near the Somali border with Kenya, according to underground Christians in the war-torn nation. Al Shabaab rebels killed 41-year-old Ahmed Matan in Bulahawa, Somalia, according to Abdikadir Abdi Ismael, a former leader of a secret Christian fellowship in Somalia to

which Matan belonged. Matan had been a member of the underground church since 2001.

The early morning shooting comes at a time when Islamist groups led by al Shabaab are hunting down converts to Christianity as they seek to establish sharia (Islamic law) throughout Somalia.

Ismael, who fled the area in 2005, said he received a telephone call from Matan two weeks ago in which the convert told him that monitoring by the Islamic extremists kept him from leaving his home and carrying out his small-trade business across the border in Mandera, in eastern Kenya.

"I am afraid for my life – the al Shabaab want to get a proof that I follow the Christian faith," Matan told Ismael. "They have not been seeing me in the mosque and seem to have realized that I am not part of them."

Ismael subsequently learned from a member of the underground church who requested anonymity that on Aug. 18 Matan was shot dead as he was about to enter Mandera with a donkey carrying goods for sale such as sugar, batteries and shampoo. He was a father of three, his last child just 3 months old.

Since the beginning of this year, Ismael said, the Islamic militants had been questioning Matan about why he was carrying on business outside of Somalia.

"They then began monitoring him, especially from the beginning of this year," said Ismael.

Besides his infant child, Matan leaves behind a widow, Fatuma, and children ages 7 and 4.

Ismael was visibly shaken by the death of his close friend.

"We have been going through difficult times because of choosing to follow Christianity," Ismael told Compass. "We have lost everything. We even lack words to share our feelings. I have been always on the run from one refugee camp to another. The Muslims have issued a fatwa on me."

Ismael had been the leader of the underground church in Bulahawa before fleeing in 2005. Bulahawa has gained a reputation for harboring Islamic extremists, mainly al Shabaab militants said to be linked with al Qaeda terrorists.

Matan, who is from a Maharan sub-clan called Habar Yaqub, was an industrious small-scale merchandise trader. His problems with the Islamist militia began long ago when he expanded his business sojourns to Kenya's northern town of Mandera, Ismael said.

The border area near Mandera, including Bulahawa, has become the site of frequent kidnappings. Lack of security forces in the area has given free rein to brutal activities by al Shabaab, which kidnapped three foreigners in the area on July 17 and spirited them into Somalia. Ismael described Bulahawa as "a very insecure and sensitive area."

In Mahadday Weyne, 100 kilometers (62 miles) north of the Somali capital of Mogadishu, al Shabaab Islamists on July 20 shot to death another convert from Islam, Mohammed Sheikh Abdiraman, at 7 a.m., eyewitnesses told Compass. They said the Islamic extremists appeared to have been hunting the convert from Islam.

The sources told Compass that Abdiraman was the leader of an underground "cell group" of Christians in Somalia. He was survived by two children, ages 15 and 10, and his wife died three years ago due to illness.

Intent on "cleansing" Somalia of all Christians, al Shabaab militia are monitoring converts from Islam especially where Christian workers had provided medical aid, such as Johar, Jamame, Kismayo and Beledweyne, sources said. Mahadday Weyne, 22 kilometers (14 miles) north of Johar, is the site of a former Christian-run hospital.

Already enforcing sharia in large parts of southern Somalia that they control, al Shabaab rebels have mounted an armed effort to topple President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed's Transitional Federal Government and impose Islamic law.

The militants reportedly beheaded seven Christians on July 10. Reuters reported that they were killed in Baidoa for being Christians and "spies."

Convert from Islam shot dead in Somalia

Islamic extremist rebel group hunts down underground church leader

By Simba Tian

Compass Direct (20.07.2009) / HRWF Int. (21.07.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Muslim extremists early this morning killed a Christian convert in Mahadday Weyne, Somalia, 100 kilometers (62 miles) north of Mogadishu.

Al Shabaab Islamist rebels shot Mohammed Sheikh Abdiraman to death at 7 a.m., eyewitnesses told Compass. They said the Islamic extremists appeared to have been hunting the convert from Islam, and when they found him they did not hesitate to shoot him.

The sources told Compass that Abdiraman was the leader of an underground "cell group" of Christians in Somalia.

"We are very sad about this incident, and we also are not safe," one eyewitness said by telephone. "Pray for us."

The sources were too distraught to share more details about Abdiraman's death. Another eyewitness who requested anonymity said Abdiraman had been a Christian for 15 years. He is survived by two children, ages 15 and 10. His wife died three years ago due to illness.

Intent on "cleansing" Somalia of all Christians, al Shabaab militia are monitoring converts from Islam especially where Christian workers had provided medical aid, such as Johar, Jamame, Kismayo and Beledweyne, sources said. Mahadday Weyne, 22 kilometers (14 miles) north of Johar, is the site of a former Christian-run hospital.

Linked with Islamic extremist al Qaeda terrorists, al Shabaab rebels have mounted an armed effort to topple President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed's Western-backed Transitional Federal Government with the intention of imposing sharia (Islamic law). The group is already enforcing sharia in large parts of southern Somalia that they control.

The militants reportedly beheaded seven Christians on July 10, and refugees from Somalia tell of other attacks. One refugee last year recounted an attack in Lower Juba, Somalia. Binti Ali Bilal, the 40-year-old mother of 10 children, was fetching firewood with

her 23-year-old daughter, Asha Ibrahim Abdalla in April 2008 in an area called Yontoy when *al Shabaab* members and Muslim neighbors approached them. Yontoy is 25 kilometers (15 miles) from Kismayo.

For some time the local community had suspected that she and her family were Christians, Bilal told Compass. The group asked the women if they were Christians, and when they said they were, the group began beating her and her daughter, who was six months pregnant, Bilal said.

After raping them and holding them captive for five days, the Muslim extremists left them for dead, she said, and her husband found them. The baby born to her daughter, she told Compass, suffers from diseases related to the prenatal trauma.

Reuters reported on July 10 that *al Shabaab* militants beheaded seven people in Baidoa that day for being Christians and "spies."

Islamists in Somalia behead two sons of Christian leader

Father refuses to give al Shabaab extremists information about house church pastor

By Simba Tian

Compass Direct (01.07.2009) / HRWF Int. (02.07.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Islamic extremists have beheaded two young boys in Somalia because their Christian father refused to divulge information about a church leader, and the killers are searching Kenya's refugee camps to do the same to the boys' father.

Before taking his Somali family to a Kenyan refugee camp in April, 55-year-old Musa Mohammed Yusuf himself was the leader of an underground church in Yonday village, 30 kilometers (19 miles) from Kismayo in Somalia. He had received instruction in the Christian faith from Salat Mberwa.

Militants from the Islamic extremist group *al Shabaab* entered Yonday village on Feb. 20, went to Yusuf's house and interrogated him on his relationship with Mberwa, leader of a fellowship of 66 Somali Christians who meet at his home at an undisclosed city. Yusuf told them he knew nothing of Mberwa and had no connection with him. The Islamic extremists left but said they would return the next day.

"Immediately when they left, I decided to flee my house for Kismayo, for I knew for sure they were determined to come back," Yusuf said.

At noon the next day, as his wife was making lunch for their children in Yonday, the *al Shabaab* militants showed up. Batula Ali Arbow, Yusuf's wife, recalled that their youngest son, Innocent, told the group that their father had left the house the previous day.

The Islamic extremists ordered her to stop what she was doing and took hold of three of her sons - 11-year-old Abdi Rahaman Musa Yusuf, 12-year-old Hussein Musa Yusuf and Abdulahi Musa Yusuf, 7. Some neighbors came and pleaded with the militants not to harm the three boys. Their pleas landed on deaf ears.

"I watched my three boys dragged away helplessly as my youngest boy was crying," Arbow said. "I knew they were going to be slaughtered. Just after some few minutes I heard a wailing cry from Abdulahi running towards the house. I could not hold my breath. I only woke up with all my clothes wet. I knew I had fainted due to the shock."

With the help of neighbors, Arbow said, she buried the bodies of her two children the following day.

In Kismayo, Yusuf received the news that two of his sons had been killed and that the Islamic militants were looking for him, and he left on foot for Mberwa's home. It took him a month and three days to reach him, and the Christian fellowship there raised travel funds for him to reach a refugee camp in Kenya.

Later that month his family met up with him at the refugee camp. When the family fled Somalia, they were compelled to leave their 80-year-old grandmother behind and her whereabouts are unknown. Since arriving at the Kenyan refugee camp, the family still has no shelter, though fellow Christians are erecting one for them. Yusuf's family lives each day without shoes, a mattress or shelter. But Arbow said she has no wish to return.

"I do not want to go back to Somalia – I don't want to see the graves of my children," she said amid sobs.

Mberwa said that Arbow is often deep in thought, at times in a disturbingly otherworldly way.

Border Tensions

Western security services see the al Shabaab ranks, reportedly filled with foreign jihadists, as a proxy for the Islamic extremist al-Qaeda group in Somalia. If the plight of Christians in Somalia is horrific – some are slaughtered, others scarred from beatings – the situation of Somali Christians in refugee camps is fast becoming worse than a matter of open discrimination.

"We have nowhere to run to," Mberwa told Compass. "The al Shabaab are on our heads, while our Muslim brothers are also discriminating against us. Indeed even here in the refugee camp we are not safe. We need a safe haven elsewhere."

He said that in April three al Shabaab militants were arrested by Kenyan security agents at Ifo refugee camp in Dadaab and taken to Garissa, Kenya's North Eastern Province headquarters. But local provincial administrators denied any knowledge of such arrests. "I don't know" is all Dadaab District Officer Evans Kyule could say when asked about the arrests.

In Naivasha, Kenya, 19 Somali extremists were arrested last month and are scheduled to appear in a Nairobi court tomorrow, according to Kenyan television network.

Al-Shabaab militants have waged a vicious war against the fragile government of Somali President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. In a show of power in the capital city stronghold of Mogadishu, last week hard-line Islamic insurgents sentenced four young men each to amputation of a hand and a foot as punishment for robbery.

After mosques announced when the amputations would take place, the extremists carried them out by machete in front of about 300 people on Thursday (June 25) at a military camp. It was the first such double amputation in Mogadishu by the rebels, who follow strict sharia (Islamic law) in the parts of south Somalia that they control.

The rebel militants' strict practices have shocked many Somalis, who are traditionally moderate Muslims, though residents give the insurgents credit for restoring order to regions they control.

Al Shabaab militants are battling Ahmed's government for control of Mogadishu while fighting government-allied, moderate Islamist militia in the provinces. In the last 18 years of violence in Somalia, a two-and-a-half year Islamist insurgency has killed more than 18,000 civilians, uprooted 1 million people, allowed piracy to flourish offshore, and spread security fears round the region.

Somalia's government, which controls little more than a few blocks of Mogadishu, has declared a state of emergency and appealed for foreign intervention, including help from Somalia's neighbors. Kenya recently has stepped up patrols along her common border with Somalia, vowing to respond militarily should militants make any incursions. At the same time, al Shabaab militants have warned that they would invade Kenya should the military patrols persist.

Nearly Losing Another Son

On Oct. 7, 2008, al shabaab militia attacked the 28-year-old son of Mberwa in Sinai village, on the outskirts of Mogadishu. They interrogated Mberwa Abdi about the whereabouts of his father, maintaining that they had information that incriminated him as the leader of a Christian group.

Abdi denied having any knowledge of his father's faith, and the Islamist extremists took Abdi out of the village and threatened to kill him. Covering his eyes and tying his hands behind him as he knelt down, they began beating his back with a gun. Abdi remained silent. The militants fired at his left side near the shoulder, and when Abdi fell they left him for dead.

On hearing the sound of the gunshot, neighbors ran to the scene and found Abdi still alive. They rushed him to Keysany Hospital in Mogadishu, where he underwent surgery. Salat Mberwa received information from neighbors that his son had been killed on Nov. 1, 2008 by al Shabaab extremists, and that his body was in Keysany Hospital. Later he heard that his son was in a coma and sent 2,500 Kenyan shillings (US\$35) for medical care. He also arranged for his wife and two youngest children to flee, knowing that they were the next target. They reached a refugee camp in Kenya in mid-December of last year.

After a month, Abdi was discharged from the hospital and arrived in the same refugee camp on Jan. 8. Medics San Frontiers provided medicine for the ailing Abdi. Abdi bears the scars of bullet wounds on his body, and he still looks ill.

Asked why he denied his father's Christian faith, Abdi said Christians are hunted like wild beasts.

"Everybody is afraid of this militia group and always tries to play things safe," he said. "There is urgent need to help Christians in Somalia to get out as soon as possible, before they are wiped out."

Salat Mberwa said he is concerned about the way Christians are being mistreated in the refugee camp.

"The Muslims cannot come to our aid in case one of us gets into a problem," he said.

"They always tell us, 'You are Christians and we cannot help you. Let your religion help you.'"

While thankful for aid from Christian groups in Nairobi, Mberwa lamented that aid agencies and denominational associations have not employed Christian refugees in the camp, though many are qualified as drivers, electricians, carpenters and educators.