



Written by [James Heiser](#) on March 14, 2011

Muslims Burn Churches in Ethiopia

An attack by militant Muslims which has thus far destroyed at least a dozen churches may signal an expansion in anti-Christian violence in Ethiopia as the next front in the recent escalation of the Jihad's war against Christianity.

Although the majority of Ethiopian Christians are Coptic, having membership in the [Ethiopian Orthodox](#) Tewahedo Church, the latest anti-Christian violence has targeted Protestant churches in the area of Asendabo, approximately 250 kilometers southwest of Addis Ababa. According to press reports, a dozen Protestant churches and the homes of at least two pastors — as well as numerous other Christian homes and properties — have been destroyed in a wave of violence which began on March 2. It should be noted that other sources indicate that the damage may be far worse than the more conservative number cited; according to [Reuters](#) and a story at [WorldNetDaily](#) the number of churches destroyed may stand at more than 50.



[According to a report from AsiaNews:](#)

Muslims [began] their attacks on March 2, after accusing the Christians of having desecrated the Koran. A crowd of Muslims shouting “Allahu akbar” (God is greatest) attacked three evangelical churches[,] setting them on fire. When the federal police arrived, the riots continued, and agents, overwhelmed by numbers, were unable to prevent other places of worship suffering the same fate.

With every passing day the violence has not decreased. According to sources, a Christian was killed, several others were injured and more than a dozen homes and places of prayer have been burned including a school, an orphanage and the offices of a church. Nearly three thousand Christians have been displaced by the wave of violence. A local Christian leader told to International Christian Concern that the attacks were organized by members of Kwarej, a radical Islamic group which aims to create a Muslim state in the majority Coptic country. Those responsible for the attacks come from different regions of the country, including those close to Somalia.

Currently, Muslims make up only roughly one-third of the population of Ethiopia, and they live primarily in a few regions of the country. According to [census data](#) published by the Ethiopian government, 43.5 percent of Ethiopians are members of the Orthodox (Coptic) Church, while another 18.6 percent are members of various Protestant churches and less than one percent are members of the Roman Catholic



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Church. Much of the Muslim minority (which accounts for 33.9 percent of the overall population of Ethiopia) is found within a few areas of Ethiopia — including the Afar and Somali regions, where they constitute over 95 percent of the population. The scene of the recent violence, the town of Asendabo, is in the Oromia region, which the census report indicates has a population which is almost evenly divided between Christians (48.7 percent) and Muslims (47.5).

[According to WorldNetDaily](#), the supposed act of “desecration” which served as the excuse for the latest anti-Christian violence may have been the work of a Muslim agent provocateur:

International Christian Concern’s Jonathan Racho has been in contact with a pastor in Ethiopia who confirms that more than 50 churches have been burned — along with a school, an orphanage and an office.

Racho said the wave of arson was touched off by Muslims framing Christians for desecrating a Quran. “The Muslims desecrated a Quran and put it in a church compound and then accused Christians of desecrating a Quran, then started attacking,” Racho said. “Since this happened, since it happened in a part of Ethiopia where Muslims have the majority, the police failed to protect the Christians.

“So the Muslim mobs were able to carry out attacks in many cities,” he said.

Meles Zenawi, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, blames a Kwarej (or Kwarja) Muslim sect for the violence. Reuters reports:

Meles told a news conference late on Saturday that “elements of the Kwarja sect and other extremists” had been preaching religious intolerance in the area.

“The government has been trying to stop the violence. That has been done quite successfully in spite of the property damage and the death of one Ethiopian,” he said. International Christian Concern said Kwarja, about whom little is known, aimed to set up an Islamic state in mainly Christian Ethiopia, where Muslims make up a quarter of the population. ...

Meles said it was hard to prosecute Islamic extremists. “We knew that they were peddling this ideology of intolerance, but it was not possible for us to stop them administratively because they are within their rights,” he said.

“If we can find some association between what they are doing by way of preaching and what happened by way of violence, then of course we can take them to court.”

As [reported previously for *The New American*](#), the timing of attacks on churches in Ethiopia coincides closely with similar attacks in the town of Soul, Egypt. In Soul, the incident which was followed by an attack on Christians was allegedly a controversy over a relationship between a Coptic man and a Muslim woman. In both Egypt and Ethiopia, the excuse for violent attacks on Christian churches was an alleged infraction of Islamic Sharia law.

At present, there is no direct evidence linking the attacks in Ethiopia to other anti-Christian violence which has erupted in the past few months — no direct link, that is, other than that which has been consistently present in Islamic doctrine. The close ties between the Copts in Ethiopia and in Egypt presumably leave them with few illusions about the plight of Christians living under an Islamic state.

Graphic: Ethiopian church



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