

And We Thought the Kidnapping Was Bad: Updates from the Persecuted Church in Nigeria | Part One

This is article one of a three-part series.

Three things stand out about the recent presentations and reports coming from *Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria* (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) regarding the persecution of Christians and Muslims in the northeastern region of Nigeria:

1. This conflict is worse than we've heard and has been going on for a long time.
2. The witness of EYN is a testimony of kingdom proportions.
3. We need to pray and be vigilant.

Reverend Dr. Musa Mambula is Spiritual Director of EYN, and gave a presentation in Pennsylvania on Sunday, January 11. He walked us through EYN's 1923 origins through the current crisis they are facing.

There are 500,000 members and a total of 1.4–1.5 million people who worship in EYN congregations and preaching points each week, which is more than all the Anabaptists in North America combined. These EYN congregations compete to lead people to Christ through establishing preaching points. Mambula believes this missionary activity is the reason why Boko Haram attacks EYN.

Boko Haram, a militant, radical group claiming to be Muslim, has been operating in Nigeria since 2001. For six years, they incited riots and burned some churches and mosques. In 2008, they began targeting Christians and churches. In 2009, they started to openly pursue an insurgency to create an Islamic state in Nigeria. They were declared a terrorist group by the US government in 2013. Their leaders trained with Al Qaeda groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Upon returning to Nigeria, they began recruiting and training youth to persecute their own people. The areas controlled by Boko Haram overlap with a concentration of EYN congregations.

As of September 2014, 1.5 million people have been displaced by the Boko Haram violence—700,000 of which are EYN members. Of 50 EYN districts, only seven are functioning. Additionally, 278 (of 456) church buildings and 1,390 (of 2,280) preaching points have been completely destroyed. Most of EYN's 456 pastors and 450 assistant pastors are homeless; eight EYN ministers have been murdered, alongside 8,034 EYN members. Whole villages and cities—homes, businesses, schools, churches, and mosques—have been obliterated by bombs and fire. These numbers have continued to escalate.

While the international media occasionally laments that it's too dangerous to report from the region and to verify first-hand accounts of the atrocities, EYN is meticulously documenting these statistics. They know the land. They know their people. They know their neighbors. They know their enemies.

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The kidnapping of the 276 Chibok schoolgirls—most of them high school seniors, 178 of them EYN members—is truly horrifying. Fifty-four girls escaped off the truck on that fateful night last April, while 218 girls are still missing, and have reportedly been sold as soldiers' brides or killed. Sixteen of their parents have died of trauma. Worse yet, the Chibok girls are just the tip of the iceberg—4,500 children and women have been kidnapped, including an EYN minister, a pregnant pastor's wife, and her three children.

“Call out to God for EYN, to have mercy on our people,” Mambula pleaded with us.

To be continued...

Sharon K. Williams is the Minister of Worship with Nueva Vida Norristown New Life Mennonite Church (PA). Her home denomination is the Church of the Brethren (U.S.).