



AP photos

# MASSACRE IN KENYA

Wire and staff reports

**WHILE MOST OF THE WORLD WAS CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF A NEW YEAR, STEVEN MBURU, PASTOR OF KIAMBAA ASSEMBLY OF GOD NEAR ELDORET, KENYA, WAS STARING DEATH IN THE FACE.**

Protestors, angry over Kenya's disputed presidential election, had gathered around 10 a.m. outside the church where Mburu and almost 200 people were crowded inside seeking safety. In moments the mob surrounded the church, doused it with flammable liquid and set it afire.

Desperate, the people inside rushed to escape as flames engulfed the building. Mburu pulled four children from a church window, but attempts to save a fifth child were unsuccessful as the fire quickly spread. Outside, those running for safety were hacked and beaten by the waiting mob.

Mburu remembers the scene clearly. "When I turned from the church window, I saw a group of people with bows and arrows aimed at me," he says. "I remembered that just the previous Sunday I had preached on Psalm 91:5: 'Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day.'" Standing bravely before the crowd, he was beaten unconscious. He was later hospitalized for his injuries.

Mburu is slowly recovering, though the bruises, swelling and eight



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missing teeth are painful reminders of the horrors of that day. At least 50 people who sought refuge inside the church were killed, and 100 more were hospitalized for severe burns. Of those, 16, mostly children, suffered burns over 90 percent of their bodies.

In what had been one of Africa's most stable democracies, an estimated 300 people were killed within three days after the Dec. 27 re-election of President Mwai Kibaki. Victims were burned alive, shot, beaten and hacked to death with machetes. By Jan. 9 the number of dead grew to 500, with 250,000 left homeless.

The re-election of Kibaki, 76, is hotly disputed. First elected in 2002, Kibaki is praised for turning Kenya into an East African economic powerhouse, but the country still struggles with tribalism and poverty. Supporters of Rail Odinga, 62, oppose the election results, feeling that smaller tribes are being marginalized. The ensuing violence

recalled scenes from the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, when more than a half-million people died in tribal fighting.

The people killed around Eldoret, about 185 miles northwest of Nairobi, the capital, were members of the Kikuyu tribe to which Kibaki belongs. Around 22 percent of Kenya's 34 million people are Kikuyu, making it the largest of the more than 40 ethnic groups in Kenya. The violence came at the hands of Kalenjin, a smaller group that protested the election results. Until the election, conflict between ethnic groups had been nearly nonexistent for decades.

George Karanja was among the survivors of the New Year's Day violence at the Kiambaa church, but others in his family were not so fortunate.

"They started burning the church," Karanja says, his voice catching with emotion. "The mattresses that people were sleeping on caught fire. There was a stampede, and people fell on one another."

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Karanja, 37, helped pull out at least 10 people, but he couldn't rescue his 11-year-old nephew. "I could not manage to pull out my sister's son," he recalled. "He was screaming 'Uncle, Uncle!'" Karanja's 90-year-old father was attacked with a machete, but survived.

"The worst part is that they were hacking people and then setting them on fire," Karanja adds.

The attackers saw Karanja saving people and began stoning him. Karanja says he ran and hid — submerging himself in a pit latrine outside the church property. He stayed there about 30 minutes until he heard people speaking Kikuyu.

Since the election, Kenyans have sought sanctuary at police stations, schools and fairgrounds in the areas of Eldoret, Burnt Forest and Nakuru, fearing an escalation of tribal and political conflict. More than 64,000 AG refugees have camped in churches and at East Africa School of Theology. Several Assemblies of God congregations in the Nairobi area are serving as refugee centers, assisting those whose neighborhoods were burned.

Kenya is home to one of the fastest-growing AG fellowships in the world, with more than 10 churches being planted every week. Nearly 1 million members attend more than 3,100 local churches, with believers from all of the major tribes worshipping together in the same congregations. Nationwide, however, much healing will need to occur if Kikuyus and Kalenjins are to inhabit the area together peacefully.

"It will require the intervention of God," Mburu says. "People can forgive, but it will be hard for them to forget what happened."

"There has been a loss of trust among neighbors," says missionary Bill Kuert, who has served in Kenya for 30 years. "There have been so many stories to the effect, 'My neighbor attacked me, robbed me and



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then destroyed my property. These are people that I have lived with and worked with for many, many years. I could not believe what they were doing to me.’ ”

Anne Njoki, a 28-year-old Kikuyu, says she fled her residence in a shantytown after she saw Kikuyus being attacked and their homes looted. “They have taken our beds, blankets, even spoons,” she says of the looters.

In Nairobi’s slums, which are often divided along tribal lines, rival groups fought each other with machetes and sticks. Rioters in the Mathare slum torched a minibus and attacked Kikuyu travelers.

“The car had 14 people in it, but they only slashed Kikuyus,” said Boniface Mwangi, who witnessed the violence.

Five people were attacked by the machete-wielding gang, he says.

As the slum burned, mothers clutching wide-eyed infants and suit-

cases were evacuated while angry youths armed with machetes and axes heaped abuse on the police.

While Westerners are not specifically targeted for violence, they are not out of danger as increased tension frequently erupts into fighting. Although skirmishes are sporadic in Nairobi, attacks occur regularly in areas outside the capital where police protection is less evident. In one area known as Kipkelion, entire neighborhoods have been burned.

The uncertainty in outlying areas is drawing waves of refugees to Nairobi in search of safety and supplies. As of late January, trucks filled with refugees

were arriving regularly. The influx of people is causing a strain on churches and relief agencies seeking to provide assistance.

“This is the worst crisis I have witnessed in Kenya in my 40 years in East Africa,” says AG East Africa Area Director Greg Beggs. “The refugee situation is getting worse.”

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**FIVE PEOPLE WERE ATTACKED BY THE MACHETE-WIELDING GANG, HE SAYS. AS THE SLUM BURNED, MOTHERS CLUTCHING WIDE-EYED INFANTS AND SUITCASES WERE EVACUATED WHILE ANGRY YOUTHS ARMED WITH MACHETES AND AXES HEAPED ABUSE ON THE POLICE.**



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Adequate food and supplies are available in Nairobi, but funds are desperately needed to purchase them. Those displaced by the tragedy are expected to need assistance for several months, and relief agencies are scrambling to keep up with the need. Convoy of Hope is preparing several containers for shipment, assisted by AG Relief. Those wanting



to help the Kenya Assemblies of God in their efforts may donate by going to <http://world.ag.org> or by calling 1-866-470-9514.

As Steven Mburu surveys the rubble of Kiambaa Assembly of God, he knows the crisis will continue long after the violence stops. Within his congregation, people are grieving their losses and wondering what the future holds. While he cannot answer all the questions, he plans to remind them of the only sure thing in life — salvation through Christ.

“When I go back to the pulpit, I want to remind

them to be ready for the possibility that tomorrow may never come,” he says. “In this world we are passersby. Then I’ll preach salvation — so that people get prepared.” **tpe**

E-mail your comments to [tpe@ag.org](mailto:tpe@ag.org).

*(Note: A media team from AGWM has traveled to Kenya to gather additional information on the crisis. Their report, including the Eldoret area, will be featured in next month’s World Missions Edition.)*

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