

Bishop shelters 2,000 Muslims from militia group in Central African Republic

"There is no such thing as a Muslim person or a Christian person. Everyone is a human being and we need to protect everyone who is vulnerable," says Bishop Juan José Aguirre of Bangassou.

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Bishop Juan José Aguirre of Bangassou / cgbinformatica / [YouTube](#)

A Catholic bishop has been sheltering 2,000 Muslims in his seminary keeping them safe from a Christian militia in the south-east of the Central African Republic.

Bishop Juan José Aguirre of Bangassou told BBC on Aug. 31 that the 2,000 Muslims who have been sheltering in his seminary for the past three months cannot leave because of Christian anti-balaka militia.

“Nearby there are anti-balaka militants who prevent them from going out to fetch water, food or firewood. So they are completely confined inside the seminary,” said Bishop Aguirre.

The Spanish bishop said that U.N. soldiers currently guard the compound but anti-balaka militia have threatened to cut people’s throats if they leave the site.

“Some anti-balaka militants are Catholic and they respect us. So I can go in and out,” he said.

"However, many any other radicals call me and threaten to kill me but I am the bishop of Bangassou. I have to protect all people who are in difficulties."

Due to a recent upsurge in violence, the church is facing difficulties in providing necessities for those sheltering on their grounds. Due to several violent incidents, some aid agencies left the town of Bangassou a month ago.

“We have spoken to various parties involved in the mediation process but anti-balaka militants are armed, very violent and even capable of killing children,” said Bishop Aguirre.

“I myself have witnessed violence against children aged 2, 4 and 5. It is very difficult to reason with anti-balaka militia. We don’t know how to solve this crisis.”

The bishop said that church property has also been vandalized.

“We have been attacked everywhere ... but we must help people when they need us, those who vulnerable, including Muslims, children, and women.

Bishop Aguirre says there are also Muslim militants who attack us, so they are targeted from both sides — by Christian and Muslim militias.

"It is very dangerous for us... but for us there is no such thing as a Muslim person or a Christian person. Everyone is a human being and we need to protect everyone who is vulnerable.”

In an earlier Aid to the Church in Need press statement released Aug. 23, the bishop said that anti-balaka militia were reacting to a massacre carried out by Muslim militants — formally of the Seleka coalition — who attacked a mission station in Gambo which is a part of his diocese.

He estimated that 40 non-Muslims were killed in the massacre that occurred earlier in August. Six local Red Cross volunteers were also among those killed, said reports.

Many of the region’s Catholics have fled to the neighboring Congo. Many of the Christians in the affected areas do not trust U.N. soldiers who are from Morocco and are Muslims.

VOA reports that the U.N. has 12,000 peacekeeper soldiers in the country with nine of them being killed around Bangassou so far this year. Militias have also targeted aid workers, including three deadly attacks against Red Cross workers.

Seleka militants seized power in the majority Christian country in 2013 but were countered by mostly Christian militias, called the anti-balaka. Animists have also joined anti-balaka militia groups.