News
Religious Life



Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa, Congo, speaks at an Oct. 22, 2024, press briefing about the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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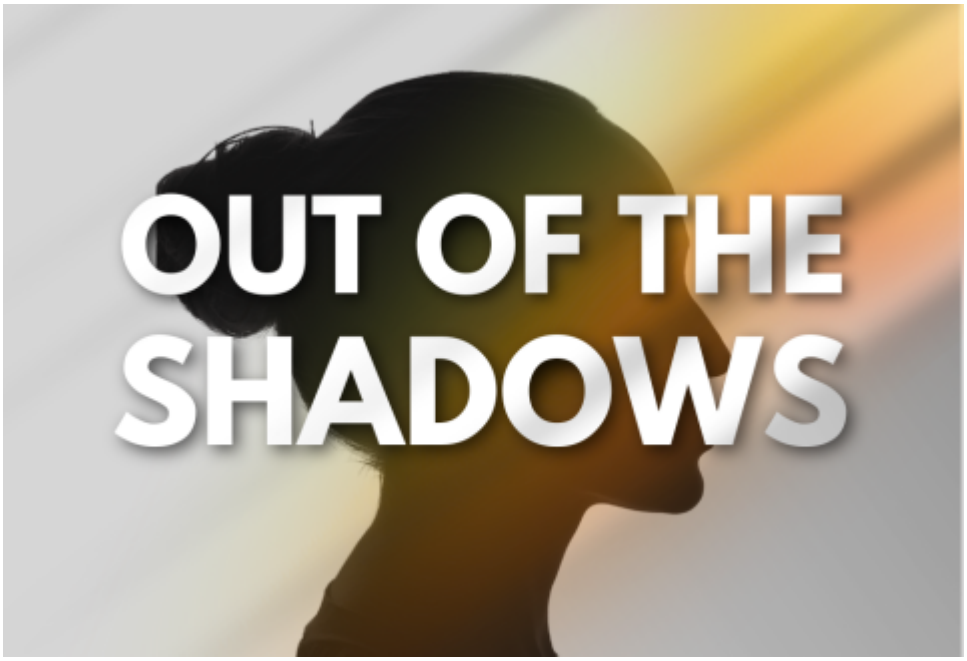
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Kinshasa, Congo — March 28, 2025

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Editor's note: *This story is part of Global Sisters Report's yearlong series, "Out of the Shadows: Confronting Violence Against Women," which will focus on the ways Catholic sisters are responding to this global phenomenon.*



(GSR logo/Olivia Bardo)

Catholic religious sisters in Congo have become the latest victims of violence as the country grapples with ongoing conflict tied to mineral resources.

Missionary Sisters of Santo Domingo in the municipality of Kimbanseke in Kinshasa, the Congolese capital, fell victim to the attack on March 18. The attackers smashed the wall of the congregation's residence to gain entry.

"They took some money, phones and computers from the sisters. We condemn the attack," Msgr. Donatien Nshole Babula, secretary general of Congo's bishops' conference, told OSV News. "There is so much poverty in Congo, and the church leaders and missionaries are being targeted because the attackers believe they have valuables to steal," he said.

Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa expressed "outrage" at the attack, while inviting various congregations to redouble their vigilance without giving in to fear or panic.

"The Cardinal expressed his solidarity with the religious who were victims of this barbarism and encouraged them to resist and be guided by the light of hope. He took the opportunity to call on the various congregations to increase their vigilance without giving in to panic or fear," read the statement signed by Fr. Clet-Clay Manvemba, chancellor of the archdiocese.

It is not the first time women religious in Congo have been attacked or targeted. On April 26, 2023, a gang leader in the southeastern city of Lubumbashi released Sr. Lucie Mwasenga a few hours after her kidnapping. Sr. Lucie was kidnapped at the orders of the gang leader, but in a turnaround, he released the nun saying he didn't want to have problems with Pope Francis, the archbishop and the Catholic Church.

In July 2021, a religious sister from the Daughters of the Resurrection was kidnapped in the city of Goma, while going to the market to shop for the community. She was later released unharmed but traumatized by the kidnappers who had demanded a ransom.

A few years back, Daughters of the Resurrection in the eastern city of Bukavu had closed seven convents after the killing of several sisters. In November 2016, Sr. Clara Agano Kahambu was stabbed to death at the Mater Dei Parish's school in the same city.

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The latest attack on Catholic sisters is also drawing attention to violence in the country's east, where the M23, or Movement 23, rebels are gaining ground. As they sweep through towns, calls for dialogue have heightened with the Catholic and Protestant churches engaging in shuttle diplomacy.

Shuttle diplomacy is when a party, either a country representative or a third party, engages in discussions between two or more countries — in this case between the government and the rebels — by talking to parties involved, carrying messages, and suggesting ways of dealing with problems.

The two churches are working through the "Social Pact for Peace and Living Together in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region," an initiative the denominations launched in January to end the cycle of violence in the region.

But as the church leaders from the two groups move together to promote the pact within Congo and other African countries, they also face backlash.

Msgr. Babula, the pact's Catholic leader, was questioned by Congo's Ministry of Interior over the pact's statement denouncing a crackdown on Swahili speaking people following the M23 rebels' takeover of Bukavu. Additionally, after the church leaders met the M23 rebel leaders in Goma in February, allies of President Félix Tshisekedi accused the Catholic Church of conspiring with "the enemy."

On Feb. 26, officials of the Congolese Directorate of Immigration at Lubumbashi airport confiscated his passport for an hour without giving any explanation. He was returning from Dar es Salaam, the Tanzanian capital, after a meeting of the Association of Episcopal Conference of Central Africa.

"The church is also being targeted because there is a view it is working against the government," said Babula.

Fr. Innocent Halerimana Maganya, a Congolese Missionary of Africa priest and a lecturer at the Tangaza University in Nairobi explained that the shuttle diplomacy — although quiet — was in agreement with the government, which is now turning its back on the churches engaged in dialogue.

"Are these attacks motivated?" the priest asked. "The bishops feel let down by the government. It could be a way of disrupting the process."

"Yesterday the church was praised, today it is being attacked because it has opted for dialogue," Maganya told OSV News.

"The crisis is real and the church is looking at the general interest of the population. The deaths are too many, and any way that will trigger more violence is not the way of the church. If one is to sit at the table and negotiate, this is the way of the church," he added.

This story appears in the **Out of the Shadows: Confronting Violence Against Women** feature series. View the full series.