

Surviving nun recalls Yemen massacre

by [Rosie Scammell](#)

March 21, 2016

c. 2016 Religion News Service

ROME (RNS) A chilling eyewitness account of a deadly attack on a Catholic nursing home in Yemen has detailed how four nuns were sought out by gunmen who then executed them before destroying the Christian symbols in the residence's chapel.

According to the lone surviving nun, the attackers entered the complex in Aden at around 8:30 a.m. on March 4 and first killed a guard and driver.

They then shot five Ethiopian Christians who were running to warn the nuns, said Sister Sally, who recounted the unfolding details of the 90-minute tragedy to the regional superior of the Missionaries of Charity, Sister Rio.

Sister Rio's handwritten notes were then shared globally and published on Thursday (March 17) by the Catholic news site *Crux* and reproduced in full at another Catholic news site, *Aleteia*. A total of 16 people were killed in the attack.

Lay workers at the residence screamed "Don't kill the sisters! Don't kill the sisters!" as the attackers entered, looking specifically for the nuns. The assailants were described in the letter as members of "ISIS," the so-called Islamic State group.

All four of the nuns caught by the gunmen were killed in the same manner, according to the account by Sister Sally, the head of the community: attackers "tied them up, shot them in the head, and smashed their heads."

The dead nuns were identified as Sister Anselm from India, Sister Judith from Kenya, and Rwandans Sister Marguerite and Sister Reginette. Members of the Missionaries of Charity, the order funded by the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta, are only identified by their first names.

Pope Francis described the women as "today's martyrs."

Sister Sally escaped by hiding behind a door in the refrigerator room, which the gunmen reportedly entered at least three times.

“They never saw her. This is miraculous,” Sister Rio wrote.

An Indian priest, Tom Uzhunnalil, was abducted by the gunmen and is still missing. He apparently sought to consume all the consecrated hosts in the chapel tabernacle before he was taken. The gunmen then destroyed all the Christian symbols and liturgical articles.

Authorities had to convince Sister Sally to leave the area for her safety.

More than 6,000 people have been killed in the Yemen conflict over the past year, according to U.N. figures.