

Islamic insurgency isn't just a Mideast problem, as Africans know well

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#)

December 31, 2014

c. 2014 Religion News Service

NAIROBI, Kenya (RNS) The rise of the so-called Islamic State dominated headlines in 2014, and trained the eyes of the world back on the Middle East.

Perhaps it should have looked at Africa as well.

In 2014, Africans suffered dozens of deadly terror attacks by groups either allied with IS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi or using similarly bloody tactics.

Consider the following:

- **In Nigeria:** Boko Haram Islamists swept through the states of Yobe, Borno, and Adamawa, killing and kidnapping civilians both Christian and Muslim. The group abducted more than 200 girls from a school in Chibok in April. The girls are still in captivity and the abduction still continues to draw global outrage.
- **In Kenya:** the Islamist militant group, al-Shabaab massacred 64 non-Muslims in Mandera County in November and December. The victims were separated from Muslims and shot on the head. In June, al-Shabaab killed 48 people—mainly Christians—in the Mpeketoni area in Lamu County.
- **In Egypt:** Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis, the Sinai-based terror group, which recently pledged allegiance to IS, took responsibility for a deadly terror attack, which left 31 Egyptian soldiers dead.
- **In the Central African Republic:** Former members of the Islamist coalition Seleka were accused of massacring 34 people in villages in northern CAR. In May, Seleka was accused of killing 11 people, in an attack at the Fatima Catholic Church in Bangui.

Across Africa, Islamic insurgency is on the rise. Initially, the groups allied with al-Qaeda, but recently younger jihadists have dumped the network to support IS.

The main groups include the following:

- **Boko Haram:** The group led by Abubakar Shekau declared allegiance to IS in July. The name, which translates as “Western education is forbidden,” is carrying one of the continent’s bloodiest terror campaigns in northern Nigeria.

- **Soldiers of the Caliphate and Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis:** Both Egyptian groups declared their allegiance to IS. The Soldiers of the Caliphate is a new Islamist group that appeared on Sept. 23. Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis has carried out an 18-month insurgency in Egypt. It has carried out public beheadings. Some reports indicate it received instruction and funding from Islamic State militants.
- **Soldiers of the Caliphate—Algeria:** The Algerian jihadists broke away from al-Qaida in the Islamic Magreb Network to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State in September. The group later ambushed a group of French tourists in a popular Algerian national park, kidnapping and beheading one of them.
- **al-Shabaab:** The Somalia-based group has not declared its allegiance to the Islamic State. It beheaded Kenyan non-Muslims in Mandera, a northeastern province of Kenya. On December 2, President Uhuru Kenyatta said the group wanted to create a caliphate in East Africa.

The Islamists are connected globally, said John Bakeni, secretary of the Roman Catholic Diocese in northern Nigeria.

“They share logistics, resources, information, funds and personnel,” Bakeni said.

Such groups arise where there are serious discontents that the groups consider unaddressed or ignored, said Jesse Mugambi, a professor at the University of Nairobi’s philosophy and religious studies department. Religion is always an excuse for expressing deeper concerns, complaints and grievances.

“When religion is used constructively, society thrives,” Mugambi said. “When it is used destructively, society strives and eventually dies.”

Bakeni said the Islamists’ demands cannot be met in pluralistic, multireligious, multicultural, and multiethnic societies. The war against them can be won if leaders unite to secure their countries’ borders.

Mugambi said Islamists can be stopped if governments are willing to address inequities.

“If there is willingness to redress the injuries, there is no reason to doubt that peaceful coexistence can be restored,” he said.