



SIERRA LEONE: Violence Erupts at Greek Orthodox Mission Run by Former Australian Rock Star

Violence Erupts At Orthodox Mission in Freetown Sierra Leone, which is run by a former Australian rock star who once toured with the Rolling Stones.

LAKE FOREST, CA 92609-0609, July 6, 2013 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Saturday, June 29, 2013

By Dan Wooding

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE (ANS) -- A revolt broke out recently against the clergy and mission staff at Waterloo Mission in Sierra Leone, which is run by Brother Themis Adams, a former Australia rock star who once toured with the Rolling Stones.

"Threats and attacks arose within the mission's compound amongst its own people that the mission cares for," said his colleague, John Tsambazis, in a message to the ASSIST News Service.

Themis Adams, who left the rock world and now heads the Orthodox Mission, in the trouble-torn West African country of Sierra Leone, is accustomed to adversity, and understands very well what could be fuelling the passion for hostility.

"This community that we are assisting is caught between two ideologies," said Brother Themis. "I jokingly refer to our Waterloo Compound as 'The Republic of Somalia.' They oscillate between peace and violence according to the situation at hand and who is their leader. In some cases they appear to believe that the point of a gun and violence would be the most effective means of survival."

Adams says that, since his move to Sierra Leone, his life has been in "imminent danger" on at least 50 occasions, but added, "My escape each time was due solely to the grace of God."

Speaking of the latest attacks, he said, "Due to a recent storm, one of the roofs on a building had blown away. Our people started to complain bitterly about it, demanding immediate action. Not being fully satisfied with our reaction, they began to hurl insults at a guest who was staying with us. Becoming increasingly aggressive they then went on a violent rampage."

A decade after the war's end, Sierra Leone still remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Between 1991 and 2002, the Sierra Leone civil war devastated the country leaving more than 50,000 people dead, much of the country's infrastructure destroyed, and over two million people displaced in neighbouring countries as refugees

Most of the country's nearly 6 million people live on less than \$1.25 (USD) a day, and it remains among the deadliest places in the world. Earlier this year, the capital of Freetown was hard-hit by a cholera outbreak.

“People do what they know to survive,” said Themis. “If they know ‘bad things’ they will do them. This is what we are here for; to help and get them back on track and, at times, this can be to our own detriment.

“After this latest rampage, my supporters wanted me to abandon the mission and return back to Australia. My staff, also, were shattered and they were ready to pack their bags too.”

According to Ajai Sahni, Executive Director of the Institute of Conflict Management, “Some Christian converts welcome the chance to free themselves from a low-caste status and join Christian missionary life and have higher expectations, so their claims might well be legitimate.”

Mr. Sahni also believes there are other underlying factors that might be contributing to the intolerance between some Christian missionary people.

“Aggressive and unprincipled missionary work that exploits the distress and ignorance of marginalized groups can constitute a catalyst to localized violence, particularly when they are brought into confrontation with other creeds,” he said. “Sensitivity and understanding is the key here.”

Themis Adams then said: “There is a tendency to romanticize missionary endeavours. The Orthodox Church and its priests, who many here believe are living comfortable lives, but the truth, however, is that the Orthodox Church in Africa is at the frontier, regularly facing life-threatening situations for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“Christianity may have become one of the world’s predominant religions, but there are still many places where Christians are persecuted, dispossessed, tortured and even killed for their faith. Often this occurs as part of governmental or religious policy.

“The Western media frequently under-reports these incidents, fearing that they might offend cultural sensibilities.”

He added: “While I was being advised to simply remove the ring leaders from the compound.....

Read full story.

<http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2013/s13060128.htm>

You might also be interested in watching a 2012 video interview with Brother Themis in which he describes his journey “from rock star to reverend” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnDlim3mYds>

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