
South Sudan, Bishop of Rumbek victim of an ambush. Sr. Balatti (Comboni missionary): "He is out of danger. Probably a warning"

She had spoken on the phone with Father Christian, as everyone calls him, a few days ago. "He was in a calm mood, not at all worried. He told me he was studying Dinka, the local language, in the morning and receiving people at the curia in the afternoon. To my knowledge, he didn't receive any threats." Then came the unexpected attack last night. He was shot in the legs and rushed to hospital. The new bishop of Rumbek is miraculously alive. SIR contacted Sister **Elena Balatti**, a Comboni nun, still shocked by the attack on Msgr. Christian Carlassare, appointed bishop of Rumbek by Pope Francis on 8 March 2021. Last night, just after midnight, two armed men knocked on the door of the curia. He opened and was shot. Monsignor Carlassare, 43 years old, born in Schio, originally from Piovene Rocchette (diocese of Padua), is the youngest bishop in the world. He had arrived in Rumbek less than two weeks ago. He is due to be installed to lead the diocese on 23 May. Father Christian was previously serving as vicar in the diocese of Malakal, where he was working with the Comboni nun.



Immagine non disponibile

[A priest who was in the next room, Father Andréa Osman, recounted the events to Radio Bakhita, a local Catholic radio station. Fortunately, the government hospital, run since 2016 by a staff from Doctors with Africa Cuamm, is 500 metres from the Catholic compound and the rescuers were able to intervene immediately. He was bleeding heavily and it was only thanks to a volunteer who had the same blood group as him, which is quite rare, that his life was saved. The bishop is no longer in critical condition and is awaiting air transfer to Juba for further medical care. Health authorities will then decide whether it is necessary to move him to Nairobi. Despite his physical pain, Fr Christian immediately called his family and the head of the Comboni missionaries in Italy:](#)

[**"Please pray not only for me but more so, for the many South Sudanese who are suffering more than I am."**](#)

["We are all shocked and saddened," said Sr. Elena. Her phone has been ringing non-stop since this morning. Phone calls have been coming in from Comboni Sisters and confreres, catechists and the Sudanese people. Pictures of the wounded bishop in hospital are circulating on social media. The](#)

people have had enough of so much violence" she said. "The Sudanese people are also saddened because their country does not appear at peace in the eyes of the world." It's the second time that a Catholic priest has been shot in Lakes State: in 2018, a Jesuit was killed at his residence in Cueibet County. **"Investigations are now underway,"** the missionary Sister confirmed, "News media reports indicate that 24 people have been detained for questioning. This is far too shocking for the country. The government is going to intervene with strong action immediately, given the international scope of the case. Justice is trying to take its course.



., Father Christian said that "relations between tribes and clans are very difficult. We experienced a new wave of violence in 2013 that displaced 4 million out of a population of 10 million. In fact, the country is being torn apart. Moreover, each tribe decided that it would have to defend itself because the State failed to guarantee protection. As a result, many armed groups are now active. Rumbek has been relatively unaffected by the violence, but here too there are frequent cases of violence and cattle theft. Unfortunately, the people are used to a climate of violence." The faithful of Rumbek, a diocese with a Dinka majority, one of the largest ethnic groups in the country, warmly welcomed Father Christian with a ceremony on April 16th. **A warning?** The Comboni Sister, serving as missionary in the world's youngest country for "so many years that I've lost count", is well aware of the sensitive nature of the domestic situation and the diffidence between ethnic groups. She stressed that Monsignor Carlassare "has no connection with politics. He was sent there by the Church, he has no responsibility." She added: "in Rumbek, many matters are settled through violence." "It was probably a warning, reminiscent of certain methods of the Italian Mafia." **Something needs to change in South Sudan.** "I hope he will heal physically and also psychologically, for it surely was a shocking experience," said Sr Elena. "He is a man of faith and I believe that he will. Now all he has to think about is his full recovery." Sister Elena said she hopes that "incidents such as this will lead people to reflect on the need for change, through education, jobs for young people and development. Only by creating alternative opportunities will the situation improve". The diocese of Rumbek was previously led by Monsignor Cesare Mazzolari, a Comboni missionary who died in July 2011, a week after South Sudan's declaration of independence. **The Bishops of South Sudan.** "May you kindly, pray to God to take charge of the situation especially quick healing for the Bishop-elect", the bishops of South Sudan wrote in a statement released on social networks by the Comboni Missionaries. The bishops pointed out that there are "no details yet on the identity of the armed men, the reason behind their attack nor official report from the local authority". An official note from the Bishops' Conference of Sudan, which brings together the bishops of both states, is expected to be released.

Patrizia Caiffa