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Carol Glatz

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Editor's note: *This piece has been updated at 1 p.m. Central time Sept. 8 with new information throughout.*

Perhaps just hours or less before her murder in northern Mozambique as militants swept into the area, Comboni Sr. Maria De Coppi left a voice message with her niece, urging her to pray for the people on the run.

"Hello, Gabriella, good evening. I just wanted to tell you the situation here is agonizing, it's not good. It is very tense," was the voice message Comboni Sr. Gabriella Bottani received from her aunt at 8 p.m. Sept. 6. The audio was posted online Sept. 7 by the Italian bishops' television news program, TG2000.

"Everyone here is fleeing, the people are running away. It is a very, very sad situation," De Coppi said after describing some recent attacks that occurred recently not far from her location at a mission in the village of Chipene in the province of Nampula.

"Pray for us, that the Lord protects us and also these people. Goodbye, good night," she said, ending her message.

According to the Vatican newspaper Sept. 8, Bottani, who is international coordinator of the Talitha Kum anti-trafficking network based in Rome, called her aunt back as soon as she heard the message.

"I asked her, 'Auntie, you're not leaving?' and, after a moment of silence, she answered 'I don't know, I want to wait,' " Bottani said, according to the Vatican newspaper article.

According to Fides, the information service of the Pontifical Mission Societies, De Coppi, 84, was killed by a bullet to the head during the night between Sept. 6 and 7 during an attack on their mission. She had been serving in Mozambique since 1963.

According to reports sent to Fides, those who attacked destroyed the mission's structures, including the church, the hospital and the primary and secondary school. Fides reported the Italian nun was killed while trying to reach the dormitory where the few remaining students were.

Other sisters and two Italian missionary priests were able to escape and hide: Fr. Loris Vignandel, 45, and Fr. Lorenzo Barro, who is the rector of a diocesan seminary in the city of Destra Tagliamento.

The BBC reported Sept. 8 that the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack, which killed four Christians, including De Coppi. The Islamic State said it killed the nun because she had "excessively engaged in spreading Christianity," the BBC reported.

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Archbishop Inácio Saúre of Nampula, Mozambique, told Fides that if the militants' claims are true, then De Coppi "is truly a martyr of the faith."

While most jihadist attacks have been in the neighboring province of Cabo Delgado, attacks in the province of Nampula began Sept. 2 and occurred again Sept. 6 in Chipene, the archbishop said Sept. 8.

"The population is disoriented and suffers a lot because they live in uncertainty and do not know what to do, many are fleeing but do not know where to go," Saúre told Fides.

"I spoke with the bishop of Nancala [where the Chipene mission is located], and he told me that the authorities have sent the military there, but that the population is scared," he told Fides.

Northern Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province is resource-rich with gas, rubies, gold and other valuable resources.

Armed violence began in 2017, with some attacks claimed by the Islamic State extremist group, resulting in more than 4,000 people killed and 800,000 more forced to flee their homes.

Upon the news of De Coppi's death, the president of the International Union of Superiors General, Adorer of the Blood of Christ Sr. Nadia Coppa, released a statement Sept. 7.

"The news has shaken and deeply disturbed us," she wrote. "Another act of horror and death in Africa tormented by civil wars, poverty and fundamentalism. A great pain that becomes communion, deep emotion and solidarity with Sr. Luigia Coccia, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries, the sisters and the people involved in this act of violence promoted by armed rebels."

The statement expressed pain for the loss of De Coppi as well as the concern for the two sisters who escaped.

De Coppi will be remembered as "a bright star that brought love," the statement continued, and as "a woman with a great missionary heart, ready to come close in sharing the fate of her people. Sensitive to the needs of displaced people, she has always worked hard to guarantee material and moral assistance without ever backing down."

The Catholic bishops of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference have also expressed their condolences, releasing a statement saying De Coppi "died a martyr's death because she has not abandoned the poor even in such difficult times."

[GSR international editor Soli Salgado contributed to this story.]