



Somalis vent fury at militia after doctors massacred

► Hundreds march against Al-Shabaab over suicide attack on graduates

By Daniel Howden
AFRICA CORRESPONDENT

DR MASLAH was still writing a message of congratulations to his best friend when news reached him of the bombing. The young surgeon was starting another gruelling shift at Galkayo hospital and was happy that a few hundred miles south in Mogadishu his friends at medical school were celebrating their graduation. A year earlier he had been the one collecting his degree as one of the first class of university graduates in Somalia since 1991. He was looking forward to getting some reinforcements.

The graduation was a welcome bright spot in a city consumed by internecine war and government ministers packed into the Shamo Hotel, along with families, lecturers and students.

But this year's class would not be so fortunate. The doctor's friend, with whom he'd studied at Benadir University for six years, was ripped apart by a massive blast along with half his class and three ministers.

A young man had sneaked into the celebration disguised in women's clothing and a veil. He made his way to the front and triggered the explosive vest he was wearing.

A witness describes what happened next. "Suddenly, the hall shook," he said. "Dozens of people were on the ground



Dr Maslah, above, is one of Somalia's few surgeons. Mourners, top left, prepare to bury the Education Minister Ahmed Abdulahi Wayel AP

under a huge cloud of smoke. The ceremony hall became very dark, and seemed like a slaughterhouse, for the blood flowing on the ground. A young man rushed to pick up his older brother, who had graduated that day, but he was already dead. The young man cried and cried."

In a country seemingly inured to the atrocities of war, the slaughter of a class of young doctors has been greeted with unprecedented anger. Yesterday, hundreds of Somalis marched from the bomb site to Benadir University in the first ever public demonstration against the Islamist militia Al-Shabaab.

No one has claimed responsibility for the bombing, and Al-Shabaab has denied it.

For Dr Maslah there is more grief than anger. "I knew most of them ... I'm very sorry," he said, repeating the phrase four times. The lost class of 2009 could not be more sorely needed. Dr Maslah, based in Galkayo, north of the capital, is one of only a dozen surgeons in the entire country. His hospital has seen 34,000 patients in the past year. He himself performs an average of 40 operations a month.

Merely resolving to stay in the country takes uncommon courage. "They have a passion for their people," says Karin Fischer Liddle from Doctors Without Borders (MSF). "They're extremely brave to have taken the decision to stay in Somalia."

Dr Maslah thought of leaving the country but says his brother convinced him to stay. The young surgeon explains that he often feared for his life just getting to school. Some patients cannot be saved as there are no blood-banks and people often travel for days just to reach a hospital. Recently the patients that arrive are often starving. The hospital is receiving more malnourished patients than ever before, according to MSF. Its feeding centre is packed with 1,800 people.

"I am not considering fleeing the country," Dr Maslah says despite his grief. "Sometimes I feel fear but I find reasons to stay. I'm in the place where I can be of most use."

Somalia An escalating tragedy

34,000

The number of patients seen by Galkayo hospital in the past year.

1,300

The number of hungry people crammed into the hospital's feeding centre, many having arrived in a state of starvation

3.6 MILLION

The number of Somalis in need of aid - nearly half the population

100,000

Approximate size of exodus of professionals from Somalia in the past year

The casualties of peace in Cyprus

Wildlife has flourished in the no-man's land that divides the country - but reconciliation could end all that



By Sven Gunnar Simonsen
IN NICOSIA

IT'S CALLED the Green Line, but despite the name, it is a completely accidental wildlife sanctuary. The narrow strip of land that zigzags across the island of Cyprus was imposed in 1974 to separate the parties to armed conflict. As humans moved out, abandoning farms and villages, nature moved in. Thirty five years on, this no man's land has become a safe haven for some of the rarest endemic plants and animals in Europe and a place of special scientific importance. Now however there's a threat hanging over the unique ecosystem, not from war, but from peace.

At its narrowest, the Green Line measures only 3.5 meters, and 7.5 km at the widest. But since Cyprus was divided in 1974, the area has seen minimal human activity, barring the occasional patrol by UN peacekeepers. The resulting surge in wildlife became evident early on, but its full scale has become apparent only since Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot scientists began working together to compile the first comprehensive inventories of plant and animal life. An absence of building development has allowed wildlife to flourish. "It means healthy populations of various species have survived without having their habitats fragmented, degraded or destroyed," explains Dr. Iris Charalambidou, a leader of the



Cyprus mouflon, top, a sub-species of wild sheep, are now established in the abandoned villages and on the slopes of the Kyrenia mountain range where, right, a Turkish-Cypriot flag has been painted; left, a wild hare SALIH GÜCEL; AFP/PHILIP MARK

joint-North South scientific team which has been studying the area.

One of the most exciting finds are populations of two indigenous plants, the Cyprus Tulip (*Tulipa cypria*) and the Cyprus Bee Orchid (*Ophrys kotschyi*), both extremely rare. Likewise, a few decades ago, there were only a few hundred Cyprus mouflon, an endangered wild sheep found only on the island. But the Green Line has helped the sub-species to thrive to the point where Cyprus now has a healthy 3,000-strong herd. In Variseia, one of the crumbling abandoned villages inside the Green



Line 200 mouflon have settled happily. Ms Charalambidou, a birdlife specialist, has also found a number of interesting species and a large number of migratory birds arrive every season. For while closed to humans, animals move in and out, and seeds fly freely. "The buffer zone may look wild, but one can still see traces of agriculture, and there are still no deep forests," says Dr. Nicolas Jarraud, environmental officer with the UN Development Programme. "Besides, there are species here now that are not endemic to Cyprus - rats and eucalyptus certainly aren't", he added.

Packs of wild dogs now also roam the buffer zone. "Cyprus has never had a predator this size, so this creates a whole new dynamic," Dr Jarraud says.

The other new dynamic is political. Since September 2008, the leaders of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities have been negotiating a reunification deal. A rare alignment of good will between the two groups and a conducive international climate (the EU and Nato are pushing for a settlement) have created the best opportunity in years for a breakthrough. Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary General

Irish bishop is first to quit over child sex abuse scandal

By David McKittrick
IRELAND CORRESPONDENT

AN IRISH bishop flew to Rome yesterday to hand in his resignation after days of angry and intense pressure over his handling of cases of child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church.

Donal Murray, Bishop of Limerick (pictured), gave every sign of acting with great reluctance, after spending some days apparently playing for time in the hope of keeping his post. But the wave of shock and horror which fol-

lowed publication of a damning report, which revealed a systematic high-level church cover-up of the abuse of children by priests, is in effect sweeping him from office.

The report revealed that archbishops of Dublin had over a quarter of a century ensured that the activities of paedophile priests were kept secret. The result was that in many cases priests were left free to continue their abuse. The report concluded, and the Irish public has accepted, with dismay and sustained rage, that the church routinely placed its own image ahead of the

protection of vulnerable children. In the case of Bishop Murray, pictured, the report concluded that he had acted "inexcusably" in one case, and that he had handled other complaints and suspicions badly.

One attempt at mitigation, pleading that he was a relatively inexperienced bishop, has been undermined by the fact that he was a professor of moral theology with a particular expertise in ethics.

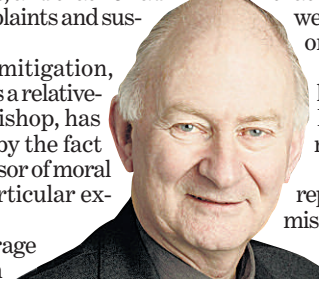
The sense of outrage against the church

is so strong that although he is the first clerical casualty of the affair he may not be the last. The report concluded

that various other churchmen were also guilty of acts of both omission and commission.

Most unusually, criticism has not been confined to the Irish church but is also being made of the Vatican itself.

Rome did not respond to repeated letters from the commission which produced the report, and since it appeared has refrained from offer-



last Friday reported "solid" progress. "I am cautiously optimistic that a solution can be achieved," he said. The parties are hoping for a Spring accord.

But the political progress is bad news for the plants and animals. Any permanent settlement will inevitably have to resolve the matter of property rights within the Green Line - most of the abandoned land once belonged to private individuals whose descendants will certainly want to reclaim their rights.

But as soon as the borders are removed, the habitats will feel the sudden impact of bulldozers and human encroachment. "Many of the species won't find a corridor to escape to safety", says Dr Salih Gücel. The idea of the area being turned into a national park has been mooted but it's unlikely the entire area would be covered even if some was.

Most of the scientific mapping of the Green Line was completed last year, and the team's final report is expected soon. "We're hoping that the decision-makers will pick it up and use it as one of their inputs," Dr Jarraud says.

Scientists hope at least to set up micro-reserves making the locals custodians of the natural heritage. And while the politicians struggle to find common ground, the scientists have found their collaboration to have fostered a new climate of trust across the ethnic divide. "Our aim was the same, and therefore we managed to build trust," said Salih Gücel, a Turkish Cypriot.

ing any detailed response beyond generalised expressions of sorrow.

This has not been enough for the Irish government, with Foreign Minister Micheál Martin expressing "deep disappointment" at Rome's response. He complained: "The Pope has not responded yet to the appalling revelations of the Murphy inquiry."

The papal nuncio, who is in effect the Vatican's ambassador to Ireland, has been summoned to the Irish foreign office to give an explanation. Mr Martin said: "We will be pointing out that we need a substantive response."

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