

Christian human rights investigator found dead in Congo

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [April 26, 2017](#) issue



Michael Sharp, center right, visits Elizabeth Namavu, left, and children in Mubimbi Refugee Camp in Congo. Photo provided by Mennonite Central Committee.

Michael J. Sharp, 34, a Mennonite peace worker in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was found dead on March 27.

Since 2015, Sharp had been working for the United Nations in the Congo. He previously worked with the Church of Christ in Congo, an association of more than 60 Protestant denominations, whose agencies respond to the needs of displaced people, support victims of violence, and encourage armed groups to demobilize and reintegrate into society.

António Guterres, UN secretary-general, confirmed Sharp's death along with the death of two others with whom he worked "seeking to understand the causes of conflict and insecurity in the DRC in order to help bring peace to the country and its people."

The UN is conducting an inquiry into the deaths, and it asked Congolese authorities to do the same. The country has been politically unstable under President Joseph

Kabila, who has exceeded his legal time in office.

In Sharp's previous assignment in the central African nation, he was Eastern Congo program coordinator for Mennonite Central Committee, a Christian relief, development, and peace-building organization. He worked with the Program for Peace and Reconciliation, including with some of the 2 million people who fled Rwanda after the 1994 genocide.

In 2015, [National Public Radio broadcast a story about the program](#), focusing on its work with rebel fighters, convincing some 1,600 people to lay down arms before the program lost funding.

"Every few weeks Sharp and his church colleagues would walk, unarmed, to the base of the rebels," NPR reported. "There they'd sit in the shade of banana trees to drink tea with the rebels and listen to their stories. Certain sensitive subjects—sexual violence against villagers, recruitment of child soldiers—were no-go, he says, because the aim was building rapport with the rebel faction. 'The more we interact the more they trust us to turn themselves in to us.'"

This article was edited on June 6 to reflect new information about the deaths of Sharp and his colleagues.