



# Kenya cult death toll surpasses 200, more than 600 people reported missing

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NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — The death toll linked to a doomsday cult in Kenya hit 201 Saturday after police exhumed 22 more bodies, most of them bearing signs of starvation, according to the coast regional commissioner.

The bodies are believed to be those of followers of a pastor based in coastal Kenya, Paul Mackenzie. He's alleged to have ordered congregants to starve to death in order to meet Jesus.

More than 600 people are still missing.

Mackenzie, who was arrested last month, remains in custody. Police plan to charge him with terrorism-related offenses.

Hundreds of bodies have been dug up from dozens of mass graves spread across his 800-acre property, located in the coastal county of Kilifi.

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Mackenzie insists that he closed his church in 2019 and moved to his property in a forested area to farm.

Autopsies conducted on more than 100 bodies last week showed the victims died of starvation, strangulation, suffocation and injuries sustained from blunt objects.

Local media outlets have been reporting cases of missing internal body organs, quoting investigators in the case.

Mackenzie, his wife and 16 other suspects will appear in court at the end of the month.

Coast regional commissioner Rhoda Onyancha on Saturday said the total number of those arrested stood at 26, with 610 people reported as missing by their families.

It is unclear how many survivors have been rescued so far from the search and rescue operations on Mackenzie's vast property. Some of them were too weak to walk when they were found.

Cults are common in Kenya, which has a religious society.

Police across the country have been questioning other religious leaders whose teachings are believed to be misleading and contrary to basic human rights.

President William Ruto last week formed a commission of inquiry to investigate how hundreds of people were lured to their deaths at the coast and recommend action on institutions that failed to act.

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Mackenzie had in the past been charged with the deaths of children in his church in a case that is ongoing in court. Residents nearby had raised the alarm after his followers moved to the forested area.

*By* – **Evelyne Musambi, Associated Press**