

# Gunmen slay American in Mauritanian capital

14 hours ago

NOUAKCHOTT (AFP) — Gunmen have killed an American teacher in the capital of Mauritania, where the slaying of foreigners by suspected Al-Qaeda militants in 2007 has already heightened fears of extremism across West Africa.

The man was shot several times in the head from close range after he resisted an apparent kidnap attempt, a witness told AFP.

Al-Qaeda militants were blamed for the killing of four French tourists in Mauritania on December 24, 2007 that heightened concerns about extremist attacks.

A gun attack on the Israeli embassy on February 1 2008 left three people wounded and was claimed by an Al-Qaeda offshoot.

Tuesday's shooting happened around 8:30 am (0830 GMT) outside a private language and computer school run by the American in Nouakchott, which overlooks the city's Ksar market and is situated opposite the district's oldest mosque.

"A foreigner has been shot dead, apparently by youths who fled. We are investigating the case," police said, adding that the victim was an American and that US embassy officials were quickly on the scene.

The interior ministry identified the man as Christopher Logest, "born in the United States in 1961". It said he also worked for a charity, Noura.

Authorities "do not rule out any motive in this crime", said a ministry statement which "strongly condemned" the killing while presenting it as an "isolated incident".

The ministry rejected opposition claims that the government had failed to guarantee citizens' and foreigners' security, saying it was "sacred".

According to a resident who witnessed the incident, the man apparently tried to resist being bundled into a black Toyota car by a group of youths.

"When they failed to get him into the car, the youths killed him," the witness told AFP by telephone.

Top security officials, the governor of Nouakchott and the state prosecutor visited the scene, where the body lay for several hours after the shooting.

Another witness said bystanders went to the man's aid thinking it was a fistfight when the attackers pointed their guns at them.

"The American put up very strong resistance, forcing one of his attackers to the ground, who shot him in the head. He fired three times," said the witness.

The caretaker of a nearby building said the attackers were "young, fair-skinned, Mauritians wearing little beards, who had been waiting for the American since dawn."

She added that the attackers "were talking among each other and appeared very agitated" as they waited for their victim.

The US national was resident in Nouakchott for several years and spoke the local Arab dialect well, locals in the central Ksar district said.

The attack came weeks before a presidential election in Mauritania, and 10 months after a military coup which ousted the country's first democratically elected president and ushered in military rule.

Neighbouring Mali launched a military operation earlier this month to root out Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) fighters in the Sahel region bordering Algeria, Niger and Mauritania.

AQIM has sought to extend its range into nations on the southern edge of the Sahara and has claimed several attacks in the region.

The killing of the French tourists forced the cancellation of last year's Dakar rally, which runs through Mauritania, because of the threat of further attacks.

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Photo 1 of 2



Photo allegedly shows the body of an American man in Nouakchott on June 23, after he was shot by a group of youths



Map

