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Auxiliary Bishop Ludger Schepers, left, of the Diocese of Essen, Germany, poses for a photo with Sr. Lorena Jenal, to his right, Rakieta Poyga, of Burkina Faso, and Gregor von Fürstenberg, vice president of Missio Aachen, Oct. 13, 2024 during an awards ceremony in Germany. Jenal received a lifetime achievement award from Missio Aachen for her ministry among victims of "sorcery accusation related violence" in Papua New Guinea. (Courtesy of Missio Aachen)



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**Editor's note:** *Global Sisters Report's Monday Starter is a feature from GSR staff writers that rounds up news from or about women religious that you may otherwise have missed.*

# Monday Starter

Swiss Sr. [Lorena Jenal](#), attacked and threatened for her decades-long defense of victims of "sorcery accusation related violence," received in mid-October a lifetime achievement [award](#) from Missio Aachen in Cologne, Germany, for her advocacy and care in Papua New Guinea, where she serves in the Diocese of Mendi.

Women tend to be the majority of those accused or suspected of sorcery, or witchcraft, in the region, but anyone, including men and children, can be randomly accused. They are subsequently tortured by mobs who attack, mutilate or sometimes kill a person in public.

In 2022, the United Nations [said](#) that media reports show an average 388 deaths annually from such attacks in Papua New Guinea, but it suspects the number is underreported.

Defending victims, as Jenal has done, has "become a life-threatening occupation," the U.N. said. A 2012 [publication](#) from the Catholic Bishops of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands said Jenal was beaten by attackers as she interrupted an attack and saved a life: a mob of hundreds tying up a woman and lighting a pyre.

In presenting the award, Gregor von Furstenberg, vice president of Missio in Aachen, emphasized "how dangerous this mission is," mentioning that Jenal "has been threatened with sharp machetes" as she freed women from attackers. Jenal thanked the organization, which has funded the shelter "House of Hope." She said the house has saved the lives of 270 women in Papua New Guinea. Missio Aachen is one of Germany's Pontifical Mission Societies.

[Jenal met Pope Francis](#) during his September visit to the nation and spoke to him about her ministry, including the shelter where the accused or injured stay, since their families initially want nothing to do with survivors, fearing reprisal from attackers. The place has also witnessed reunification of attacked women with their families.

"In times of war, disease and disaster, people often look for scapegoats," the bishops' conference said in its publication. "The United Nations is watching this with great concern. Sadly, across over 30 countries of the world, sorcery related violence and witchcraft is at its peak."

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## **Women and men religious denounce priest killing in Mexico**

The Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Religious, known as CLAR, said it "repudiates" the Oct. 20 [assassination of an Indigenous Jesuit priest](#) who was killed after returning home from Mass.

"CLAR adds its voice to the Conference of Religious of Mexico, in solidarity with the profound pain of the family, friends and community of San Cristobal de las Casas due to the assassination of Fr. Marcelo Perez," said the largest organization of women and men religious in Latin America and the Caribbean, in an Oct. 21 statement [posted on Instagram](#).

The priest, who was a member of the Indigenous Tzotzil community, was a peace advocate and tried to mediate between armed groups terrorizing Indigenous people and farm laborers, speaking against the violence they face in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, CLAR said.

[News](#) reports said the priest was shot by two men on a motorcycle. One person had been arrested as of Oct. 24.



Scalabrinian Sr. Rosita Milesi, pictured in an undated photo, is director of the Migration and Human Rights Institute, one of two Catholic-backed organizations that inaugurated a refugee center in Brazil's capital, Brasilia. (CNS/Courtesy of IMDH)

## **UN refugee agency honors Scalabrinian sister**

The United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Refugees has honored a Brazilian sister as the [Nansen Refugee Award's](#) 2024 Global Laureate.

Scalabrinian Sr. Rosita Milesi leads the [Institute for Migration and Human Rights](#) as well as RedeMIR, organizations that provide shelter, education, health and legal assistance to migrants and refugees. Through the Scalabrinians, she studied law to better help those she came in contact with in more than 40 years of ministry.

"Sister Rosita has personally assisted thousands of people on the move — helping them access legal documentation, shelter, food, health care, language training and access to the labor market in Brazil," said UNHCR. "As a lawyer, she has also been instrumental in shaping public policy."

The agency credits her with helping "amplify refugee rights" with her work on Brazil's 1997 refugee law, ensuring that it would do "more to protect, include and empower people forced to flee and aligns with international standards."

The [prize](#), awarded in an Oct. 14 ceremony, comes with a commemorative medal and a cash award of \$100,000 donated by the governments of Norway and Switzerland, says a website for the Norwegian government.



Sisters from different congregations joined the Oct. 24-26 training program organized by Talitha Kum Bangladesh in Dhaka, Bangladesh. (Stephan Uttom Rozario)

## **Talitha Kum Bangladesh trains nuns and youth to recognize human trafficking**

Talitha Kum Bangladesh is expanding its network by training nuns and youth to protect against human trafficking, child marriage and forced marriage in Bangladesh.

[Talitha Kum Bangladesh](#) arranged a three-day training program Oct. 24-26 with 20 sisters from different congregations, 25 youth from eight dioceses, and one religious brother.

[Congregation of Salesian Sisters' of Mary Immaculate](#) Sr. Josephine Rozario, coordinator of Talitha Kum Bangladesh, led the training.

"We are still in the training phase and we are working together ... to connect the youth to our network. By doing this, the youth will be protected from trafficking, child marriage and forced marriage and will be able to protect others as well," Rozario told GSR.

In 2019, Rozario, along with Holy Cross Fr. Liton Hubert Gomes, secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh, started the Talitha Kum Bangladesh movement.

"If we can't do anything big then we are trying to save the future generation from human trafficking through this awareness," Rozario said. "In the future, we will carry out extensive awareness campaigns."