

Kenyan cult leader appears in court after more than 100 followers die

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A Kenyan cult leader accused of ordering his followers to starve themselves to death appeared in court on Tuesday, 2 May 2023, as investigators searched for more bodies in a forest in eastern Kenya where 101 corpses have already been unearthed.



Paul Mackenzie, 50, a Kenyan cult leader accused of ordering his followers of the members of the Good News International Church to starve themselves to death in Shakahola forest, appears at Malindi Law Courts, in Malindi, Kenya, 2 May 2023. Reuters/Stringer

Kenyan authorities say the dead were members of the Good News International Church led by Paul Mackenzie, 50, who had predicted the world would end on 15 April and ordered his followers to kill themselves to be the first to go to heaven.

The death toll stands at 109 - 101 bodies, mostly children, found in mass graves and eight people found alive who later died - but could rise further. The interior ministry said more than 400 people are missing.

Mackenzie, who is in police custody, has not commented publicly on the accusations against him nor been required to enter a plea to any criminal charge. Two lawyers acting for him have declined to comment.

An investigator involved in the case, who did not wish to be identified, told *Reuters* Mackenzie has denied ordering his followers to fast.

Mackenzie faces a number of charges relating to earlier alleged offences, but prosecutors have yet to issue a charge sheet in relation to the mass graves.

Citizen Television showed Mackenzie appearing in court in the coastal town of Malindi, about an hour and a half away by car from the Shakahola forest where the mass graves have been found.

He was wearing a pink shirt and jacket, standing alongside eight other cult members.

Kenyan media reported that the Malindi court transferred the case to the larger port city of Mombasa.

The government's chief pathologist said on Monday that so far 10 autopsies had taken place, on the bodies of one adult and nine children. Most showed signs of starvation, while two children showed signs of asphyxiation, he said.

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