

# Ancient boy's skeleton sparks evolution debate

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## Story Highlights

- Kenya's national museum to display 160,000 fossils
- Turkana Boy, most complete prehistoric human ever found, to be shown
- Kenyan evangelicals upset that the exhibit contradicts Bible

**NAIROBI, Kenya** (AP) -- Deep in the dusty, unlit corridors of Kenya's national museum, locked away in a plain-looking cabinet, is one of mankind's oldest relics: Turkana Boy, as he is known, the most complete skeleton of a prehistoric human ever found.

But his first public display later this year is at the heart of a growing storm -- one pitting scientists against Kenya's powerful and popular evangelical Christian movement. The debate over evolution vs. creationism -- once largely confined to the United States -- has arrived in a country known as the cradle of mankind.

"I did not evolve from Turkana Boy or anything like it," says Bishop Boniface Adoyo, head of Kenya's 35 evangelical denominations, which he claims have 10 million followers. "These sorts of silly views are killing our faith."

He's calling on his flock to boycott the exhibition and has demanded the museum relegate the fossil collection to a back room -- along with some kind of notice saying evolution is not a fact but merely one of a number of theories.

Against him is one of the planet's best-known fossil hunters, Richard Leakey, whose team unearthed the bones at Nariokotome in West Turkana, in the desolate, far northern reaches of Kenya in 1984.

"Whether the bishop likes it or not, Turkana Boy is a distant relation of his," Leakey, who founded the museum's prehistory department, told The Associated Press. "The bishop is descended from the apes and these fossils tell how he evolved."

Among the 160,000 fossils due to go on display is an imprint of a lizard left in sedimentary rock, dating back 200 million years, at a time when the Earth's continents were only beginning to separate.

Dinosaur fossils and a bone from an early human ancestor, dating back 7 million years, will also be on show along with the bones of short-necked giraffes and elephants whose tusks

protrude from their lower jaws.

They provide the clearest and unrivaled record yet of evolution and the origins of man, say scientists.

But the highlight will be the 5-foot-3 Turkana Boy, who died at age 12 and whose skeleton had been preserved in marshland before its discovery.

It will form the center stage of the exhibition to be launched in July following a \$10.5 million renovation of the National Museums of Kenya, financed by the European Union. The EU says it has no concerns over the displays and that the museum was free to exhibit what it wished.

Followers of creationism believe in the literal truth of the Genesis account in the Bible that God created the world in six days. Bishop Adoyo believes the world was created 12,000 years ago, with man appearing 6,000 years later. He says each biblical day was equivalent to 1,000 Earth years.

Adoyo's evangelical coalition is the only religious group voicing concern about the exhibition.

Leakey fears the ideological spat may provoke an attack on the priceless collection, one largely found during the 1920s by his paleontologist parents, Louis and Mary Leakey, who passed their fossil-hunting traditions on to him.

The museum, which attracts around 100,000 visitors a year, is taking no chances.

Turkana Boy will be displayed in a private room, with limited access and behind a glass screen with 24-hour closed-circuit TV. Security guards will be at the entrance.

"There are issues about the security," said Dr. Emma Mbua, the head of paleontology at the museum. "These fossils are irreplaceable and we wouldn't want anything to happen to them."

Insurance coverage could run into millions of dollars, she added.

Mbua, a Protestant, is a little taken aback at the controversy but has no problems reconciling her own faith to the scientific evidence.

"Evolution is a fact," adds Mbua, who has run the department for the last five years.

"Turkana Boy is our jewel," she said. "For the first time, we will be taking him out of the strong room and showing our heritage to the world."