

One dead, 22 hurt in Ethiopian violence

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Source: Reuters

(Adds police saying one civilian killed)

By Tsegaye Tadesse

ADDIS ABABA, Jan 20 (Reuters) - One person was killed by a grenade and police shot and injured 22 others on Friday when a procession by tens of thousands of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians turned violent, hospital sources and witnesses said.

An eyewitness said police shot in the air as participants, singing and chanting religious songs to celebrate the annual St. Michael's Day, refused orders by police to disperse.

Police shot at the crowd after groups taunted the police, blocked roads and shouted anti-government slogans. The disturbances were reported in several places in the capital Addis Ababa.

"Police acted after an unidentified person threw a grenade at the police," a police spokesman said, adding that it missed its target and killed a civilian and injured three policemen.

The shooting took place at a time when a high-level U.S. delegation is in Ethiopia, after a visit to the border with Eritrea, as part of efforts to ease tensions between the two countries over a border dispute.

A doctor at Menelik Hospital who declined to be named, told reporters that of the 16 with gunshot wounds, three were in critical condition.

"They were shot in their chest, limbs and around their pelvis," the doctors said. "Most of the wounded are young people but there were also old people and two women."

Another doctor at St. Pauls hospital said six people had been brought with gunshot wounds but most had been discharged.

MEMORIES

Witnesses said the shootings brought memories of last year's clashes in the capital Addis Ababa when the government arrested thousands of opposition members after two bouts of violence in which 82 people were killed in June and November 2005.

The violence was sparked by opposition claims that the government manipulated a May 15 election.

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has repeatedly accused the opposition of plotting to incite violence, through street demonstrations, to topple his government.

Senior political figures from the opposition, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and 13 journalists are among 131 people charged with treason and plans to commit genocide.

Donors, including Britain, have said they will stop direct budget support to the government because of concerns about the arrests, governance and human rights.

Serkalem Argaw, 22, said she was on her way to church when she was shot and wounded in her left leg.

"I was walking to the church carrying my baby on my back. I tried to run also, but was shot on my left leg and began bleeding," she said at the Menelik Hospital.

Wubishet Solomon, 17, said he was running from the disturbances when he was hit by a bullet in his neck.

"I felt a searing pain and when I held my neck I felt blood and I collapsed for a while," he said.