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Ambon death toll rises



Shops and houses were gutted in the last wave of violence

As violence continues between Muslims and Christians on the battle-scarred Indonesian island of Ambon, the official death toll is approaching 100.

More bodies were pulled from wrecked buildings on Wednesday, two weeks after the clashes broke out.



The country's Information Minister Yunus Yosfiah told reporters after a cabinet meeting that 94 people were confirmed dead.

And the authorities expect the toll to rise as they comb hundreds of wrecked homes, shops, mosques and churches.

Fighting started again a day ago and police fired warning shots at crowds in a marketplace to try to quell the unrest.

Mobs of Christians and Muslims hurled rocks at each other, and stoned and burned two cars.



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Police were reported to have fired on the crowds

"The situation is still sensitive. That's why when the police fired a warning shot, it made people panic," the journalist said. Terrified city residents have locked themselves inside their homes, while others are reported to have fled to military installations to look for shelter.

The government's Human Rights Commission was forced to abandon plans to investigate some of the areas worst hit by last month's rioting, after a mob blocked a road and waved machetes at the team.

Violence between the two groups in the eastern province of Maluku first flared up in January, killing at least 65 people and leaving Ambon looking like a war zone.

Ethnic, religious and political tensions have frequently boiled over during Indonesia's country's worst economic and social crisis in three decades.

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