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New strife in Moluccas



People escaped last month's violence by ship

At least 30 people have been killed in new religious clashes in the Eastern Moluccan Islands, according to the Indonesian authorities.

Local officials say Christians and Muslims have fought with swords, spears and home-made bombs over the last four days, ignoring appeals from community leaders to lay down their weapons.

The clashes took place on two remote islands in south-east Maluku.



Many homes in Ambon have been destroyed

Troop reinforcements have been sent from the provincial capital Ambon, which up until now has seen the worst of the violence in the region.

The latest trouble started with the discovery of graffiti insulting Islam, and quickly escalated into bloody clashes where gangs have been trying to drive out members of rival faiths and burn down their homes.

More than 200 people have died since fighting between Christians and Muslims in the



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Moluccas broke out in January.

Thousands of troop reinforcements have been flown to Ambon, where the situation has been calm for the past month.

Fear and mistrust

Christians and Muslims have lived side by side for decades in the Moluccas.



A soldier on patrol in Ambon

But the BBC South East Asia Correspondent Jonathan Head says they have now been infected by the climate of fear and mistrust which prevails in much of the country.

He says the continued unrest will make it almost impossible for the general election, scheduled for June, to take place in the worst-affected areas.

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