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[UK Politics](#)

[Business](#)

[Sci/Tech](#)

[Health](#)

[Education](#)

[Sport](#)

[Entertainment](#)

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[On Air](#)

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[Low Graphics](#)

[Help](#)

World: Asia-Pacific

Religious riots on Indonesian island



Victim attacked by rampaging mobs carried to safety

At least 14 people have been killed in the latest religious fighting on the Indonesian island of Ambon.



Much of Ambon city has been reduced to rubble

house was set on fire.

The governor of Maluku province has requested more assistance from the military headquarters in Jakarta but so far none has arrived, leaving the security forces very thinly stretched.

Reports say the latest victims were killed as people fought with spears and swords. Security forces opened fire on rival groups, inflicting further casualties.

Witnesses said another person burned to death when his



The latest violence is reported to have broken out in a Muslim area, but smoke



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from burning houses could later be seen from several parts of the city.

At least 135 people have died in the province this year, in the worst rioting since the downfall last May of former President Suharto.

Christian areas hit worst

Indonesia is overwhelmingly Muslim, but the unrest has hit areas with large Christian populations.

A senior Indonesian military officer, Agus Wirahadikusumah, has warned that the armed forces no longer have sufficient resources to contain the unrest breaking out across the archipelago.



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The BBC's correspondent in Ambon, Jonathan Head, said: "The Muslim and Christian neighbourhoods, which have lived in peace side by side for centuries, have now barricaded themselves in, guarded by gangs of men armed with long swords and machetes.

"Heavily armed soldiers and police are everywhere, trying to prevent further incidents, but they seem powerless to stop two communities apparently determined to fight each other.

"The two small police helicopters based here can barely keep track of outbreaks of religious violence, which are now spreading to neighbouring islands."

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