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Ten killed in Indonesia clashes

At least 10 people have died in renewed fighting between Christians and Muslims in Indonesia's Moluccan islands, police and witnesses say.

People fought with knives and stones, buildings were set alight and an Associated Press reporter says he saw two men hacked to death in the street.

It came as separatist Christians paraded in the capital, Ambon, to mark a failed independence bid 50 years ago.

More than 5,000 people have died since a sectarian conflict broke out in 1999.

The two groups signed a government-sponsored peace pact in 2002, which had appeared to be holding.

Explosions

Witnesses said gangs of Muslim and Christian youths hurled stones at each other in the centre of the provincial capital on Sunday.

Gunfire was heard, as well as several small explosions.

The director of the city's al-Fatah hospital said eight bodies - most with gunshot wounds - had been brought in, AP reported.

The news agency's reporter said he saw a gang of about 50 people armed with swords and sticks hack two men to death close to Pattimura university. The victims' bodies were left lying in the street.

At least three buildings were set alight, including an office used by the United Nations.

The Moluccas, 2,600 kilometres (1,600 miles) east of Jakarta, became known as the Spice Islands during Dutch colonial rule because of its famous nutmeg and cloves.



At least three buildings were set ablaze in the clashes



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Spice islands' peace bearing fruit

By Rachel Harvey
BBC, Ambon

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Indonesia has been plagued by ethnic and religious violence in recent years, but nowhere more so than in the Islands of the Moluccas.

In 1999 a brutal conflict between Christians and Muslims erupted without warning.

But a peace deal signed in 2002 appears to be holding and on the region's main island Ambon, the first tentative steps towards reconciliation are now being taken.

Ambon's main market was torched at the height of the fighting. But these days the area is bustling with activity.

It is where fishing boats land their catches, and where the island's famous spices - nutmeg and cloves - are traded.

Ambon's Christian Mayor, Jopei Papilaya, has been instrumental in getting the market up and running again.



Ambon's market has become a symbol of reconciliation

He is a passionate advocate for economic integration. "Everybody needs food" he said. "So I say to people, go buy from Muslims, go buy from Christians. The important thing is that you're Ambonese and we all need the same things."

Concentrating on common interests may be the key. But there are deep divisions to be overcome.

The violence is thought to have been triggered by a minor traffic accident. But resentments had probably been simmering beneath the surface for some time.

Sectarian violence

Under the authoritarian rule of former President Suharto, differences were suppressed. But after his downfall, the fault lines were exposed.

Muslims believed that Christians were given the best jobs in the civil service - a legacy perhaps of the fact that under Dutch colonial rule, Christians were offered better education.

The Christians feared an influx of Muslims from other parts of Indonesia would make them a vulnerable minority.

The situation was further exacerbated by the direct involvement of Indonesian security forces in the fighting, and the presence of Muslim militants who viewed the conflict as part of their jihadist struggle.

Three years of sectarian violence left more than 5,000 people dead. Thousands more fled to neighbouring islands.



In one school classes are integrated

Evidence of the physical destruction caused by the conflict is everywhere. In Ambon

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city, there are gaps in the skyline where houses and shops were burned to the ground.

Interestingly it is the churches and mosques which seem to be the focus of much of the reconstruction now going on. That is in spite of the fact that there is a clear need for new housing. Hundreds of internally displaced people are still living among the wreckage.

Recovery

In an old post office building, ravaged by fire, five families have made their home. There is no running water, apart from what falls through the open roof. But a hazardous looking electricity wire has been rigged up somehow.

Ida moved here with her husband and three children almost a year ago. It is the fifth squat they have adopted since fleeing their own home in 1999.

"We weren't wealthy before," she said, "but at least we had our own house."

Ida is a vivid example of how far Ambon still has to come along the road to recovery.

Directly opposite the ruins of the post office is an equally vivid example of the kind of project now being implemented to try to rebuild Ambon's shattered communities.

It is a school. Or more accurately, two schools under one roof. One is a Muslim school run by Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's second largest Muslim organisation. The other is a government-run Christian school.



“ The two communities have an interest in working together ”

Patrick Sweeting
UNDP

The details of cohabitation are still being thrashed out. For now, the Muslims have the school in the morning; the Christians take over in the afternoon.

However, one class of 15-year-olds is integrated. It is being called a reconciliation class. But these are very early days.

Slowly, gently, these teenagers are being encouraged to discuss the shared experiences which have affected them all. At least half the class of 40 knew someone personally - a friend or relative - who was killed during the sectarian violence.

Trust

Almost all have disturbing memories of that time.

Eldri, a Christian boy, remembers bullets whizzing past his head. Cars and houses were set on fire in the street outside his home.

Now he is proud to be part of a mixed class.

"We will stay together for quite a long time, so we have a chance to get to know each other," he said. "Maybe we can show other people that there don't need to be barriers between us any more."

The project is being watched closely by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which has provided much of the financial support.

It is hoped that the mixed class will be a first step in a developing process of integration within the school.

"We're also looking at how the pupils go home and discuss things with their parents," said Patrick Sweeting, head of the UNDP's Crisis Prevention and Recovery Unit in Indonesia.



"Parents from the two schools come together and are working for a common purpose. This is a shared facility now, so the two communities have an interest in working together to make sure it works well."

It is going to take time to rebuild the trust between the two religious communities. But the hope is that small scale projects, focussing on everyday activities - like the market and the school - will provide the foundations for a more comprehensive reconciliation process.

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