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Michelle Bachelet calls on authorities to conduct independent investigations into the deadly religious violence.

Aljazeera (07.05.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3kWL0rt> - The UN human rights chief has voiced alarm at recent deadly clashes between Muslims and Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia and called on authorities to investigate and bring perpetrators to justice.

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said on Saturday that she was "deeply distressed" by the violence that erupted late last month in northern Ethiopia, reportedly killing at least 30 people and injuring more than 100 others.

The [clashes began in Gondar city](#) in the Amhara region on April 26, reportedly in connection with a land dispute, before quickly spreading to other regions and the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, she said.

The Islamic Affairs Council of Amhara said the funeral of a Muslim elder had been attacked, describing the scene as a "massacre" by heavily armed "extremist Christians". The cemetery where the attack occurred neighbours a mosque and church and has been the subject of an ongoing dispute between Muslims and Orthodox Christians, who are the dominant group in Ethiopia.

"I understand two mosques were burnt and another two partially destroyed in Gondar," Bachelet said in her statement.

"In the apparent retaliatory attacks that followed, two Orthodox Christian men were reportedly burnt to death, another man hacked to death, and five churches burnt down" in the southwest of the country, she said, adding that other regions had since seen clashes.

In all, police had reportedly arrested and imprisoned at least 578 people in at least four cities in connection with the clashes, she said.

"I call on the Ethiopian authorities to promptly initiate and conduct thorough, independent and transparent investigations into each of these deadly incidents," Bachelet said.

Prevent further inter-religious violence

Authorities should strive to “ensure that those found to be responsible are held to account”, she said, stressing that “individual accountability of perpetrators is essential to prevent further violence.”

At the same time, “those arrested must be fully accorded their due process and fair trial rights in accordance with international human rights law, without discrimination.” The UN rights chief also called for broader action to reconcile communities in Ethiopia, where Muslims make up about a third of the population.

“To prevent further inter-religious violence, it is crucial that the underlying causes of this shocking violence are promptly addressed,” she said, urging “meaningful participation of survivors, families and affected communities”.

Such violence in Ethiopia is not a new development. In 2019, authorities arrested five people suspected of burning down four mosques in the town of Motta in the same region. Fighting in [Ethiopia’s wider conflict](#) has eased since the federal government declared [a unilateral ceasefire](#) last month, saying it would allow humanitarian aid to enter Tigray.

When Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took power in 2018, he introduced sweeping political and economic reforms that won him international praise, culminating in the award of the Nobel Peace Prize for peacemaking efforts with longtime enemy Eritrea.

Photo: The UN rights chief also called for broader action to reconcile communities in Ethiopia, where Muslims make up about a third of the population [File: AFP]
