

Kenya: Hundreds displaced by fresh clashes in Isiolo

By IRIN

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Hundreds of people have been displaced and six killed in a fresh wave of ethnic clashes in the central Kenyan region of Isiolo where a spate of attacks and counter-attacks since late 2011 have left dozens dead.

In the first attack on 13 February in Gambella, near Isiolo town [but in neighbouring Meru County], three farmers were killed on their farms "as they harvested tomatoes"; three more were killed on [14 February] at Kampi ya juu, Isaiah Nakoru, the provincial commissioner told IRIN.

One man was shot by the police after he attacked them as they were clearing a section of the Isiolo-Moyale highway blocked by people demonstrating against insecurity.

Several houses were burnt down in the attacks. "I lost everything, all clothes, cooking utensils," said Aragai Lele, a widow and mother of seven.

Lele said she had been forced to have her children spend the night in three different houses as a precaution. "It was good to separate them," she said.

"We have so far managed to find 15 houses burnt at Chechelesi and Kampi ya juu. More than 1,000 people mainly from the Turkana community have fled the two areas," said an aid worker who preferred anonymity. Chechelesi and Kampi ya juu are close to Isiolo town.

The aid worker added that tens of subsistence farmers from the Meru and Borana communities had abandoned their farms in Gambella and moved to Isiolo town. Others have moved to Maua, in Meru County, further south. Assessments to ascertain the number of those affected are ongoing, he said.

Shops and banks in Isiolo, as well as more than 15 primary schools in Isiolo and neighbouring parts of Meru, are closed.

"Isiolo is a war zone, many people have been killed and children orphaned. We have witnessed an increase in the number of widows; hundreds of families have lost their homes and been displaced, with no effort made to resettle them," said an official with the Nomadic Community Rehabilitation Programme, Ahmed Mohamed.

According to analysts, the violence in Isiolo is politically motivated and could continue until the next general elections scheduled for either December 2012 or March 2013.

Local residents interviewed said the latest clashes were intended to cause a rift between Meru and Turkana voters who have planned an alliance ahead of the elections. Several communities have been caught up in the fighting, but most of the past violence has been between the Borana and the Turkana.

In a press statement on 15 February, Kenya Christian church leaders appealed to Kenyans "to reject any efforts by politicians to incite them against one another and shame and reject any leaders who stoke tribal emotion."

"Without a definite election date, Kenyans remain anxious and the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission cannot sufficiently plan for the polls," the church leaders said.