Up to 19 Killed in Djibouti Violence

December 21, 2015

By [Harun Maruf](http://www.voanews.com/author/23497.html)

Voice of America

<http://www.voanews.com/content/up-to-19-killed-in-djibouti-violence/3112426.html>

Opposition activists in Djibouti say as many as 19 people were killed Monday when security forces opened fire on a religious gathering in the capital.

Witnesses said the troops targeted a crowd in the Balbala neighborhood that was commemorating the late religious leader Sheikh Yonis Muse.

Security forces raided the venue at around 5 a.m. local time and began shooting, according to the sources.

A reporter for VOA in Djibouti says more than 10 people were wounded in addition to those killed.

The government of Djibouti says security forces opened fire after being attacked by an armed group of people.

"This morning... dozens of armed individuals came together before launching an offensive against the security forces," said a statement from Minister of the Interior Hassan Omar Mohamed.  The statement said nine security personnel were wounded, including an officer, but it did not mention any deaths resulting from the clash.

The minister said the violence was an “act intended to destabilize our nation" and was "orchestrated by malicious individuals receiving instructions from sponsors who act from abroad."

Mohamed's statement said several suspects had been arrested in connection with Monday's incident.

Deputy opposition leader Omar Elmi Khayre told VOA's Somali Service that civilians were celebrating at the religious event when police and gendarmes attacked the crowd.  He said some of those targeted were opposition supporters.

Khayre said other opposition members were attacked by police during a meeting at their headquarters. He said the leader of the opposition, Ahmed Yusuf, and an opposition MP were wounded in that raid.

Police chief Abdullahi Abdi confirmed the raid to VOA, saying the police were hunting those responsible for the earlier violence.

Djibouti, a small country on the east coast of Africa, has been dominated by the People's Rally for Progress party since the late 1970s. The party now rules the country as part of the Union for Presidential Majority coalition.