

Ethiopian rebels admit attack, deny killing western tourists

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By Tesfa-Alem Tekle

January 24, 2012 (ADDIS ABABA) - An Ethiopian rebel group has taken responsibility over a deadliest attack last week in a remote area of Ethiopians north east Afar region.

Five western tourists two Germans, two Hungarians and an Austrian were killed in an assault last Tuesday. Two Ethiopians and two Germans were also taken hostage by the dozens of attackers who Ethiopia said crossed from Eritrea.

The Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front (ARDUF), a rebel group fighting for greater autonomy for the East African Afar region, in statement Sunday admitted to abducting two Germans and two Ethiopians but denied killing the five European tourists.

The group instead said Ethiopian forces were responsible over their death which according to the statement occurred during a battle with the armed rebel members.

ARDUF alleged killing 16 Ethiopian soldiers and wounding a dozen more during the fire exchange.

Addis Ababa accused neighboring Eritrea over the attacks saying Asmara trained, armed and sent the assailants to carry out the attack.

However the Afar rebel group categorically denied of Eritrean government role for the attack.

It said "The fighting occurred between ARDUF and Ethiopian forces. Both European Nationals and Ethiopian soldiers were killed in battle with ARDUF. Therefore Ethiopian accusation of Eritrea of arming and training Afar Rebel (ARDUF) is baseless and unfounded"

Last Thursday Ethiopia authorities in Afar region said they have sent elders to negotiate with the group for a safe release of the two German tourists and two Ethiopians being held hostage.

"We can ensure that their peaceful release will be granted through peaceful negotiation through the Afar elders in the region." ARDUF said in its statement further confirmed hostages being in good health. But they didn't put any precondition for their release.

The group also declined to disclose where hostages are being held. Ethiopia believes they are inside the red sea state.

The abducted four were part a total of 27 foreign tourists and two Ethiopians (a driver and a police man) who were visiting Erta Ale area, one of Ethiopia's most active volcanos, located along the inhospitable Danakil depression.

Following Eritrea's independence in 1993, Ethiopia and Eritrea have become bitter adversaries. During 1998-2000, the two rivals fought a bloody border war which killed at least 70,000 people.

There had been a similar incident in 2007 when five Europeans and eight Ethiopians were seized by the Eritrea-based ARDUF separatists.

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