Ethiopia: Police arrest Muslim protesters as clashes continue

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By Tesfa-Alem Tekle

July 22, 2012 (ADDIS ABABA) – Ethiopian police on Sunday said that they had arrested several people after violent clashes between police and Muslim protesters continued on Saturday in the capital, Addis Ababa.

The clash occurred at the Anawar Mosque following noon prayers.

“Protesters blocked worshipers from leaving the Mosque compound. They hold them hostage until riot police forces took situation under control” Deputy Police commissioner Girma Kassa said.

Kassa said police has arrested several stone-throwing protesters who also attacked private buildings and government institutions but didn’t specify a figure.

Eye witnesses told *Sudan Tribune* that many people have suffered injuries during the clashes which continued on the third day of fasting for the month-long festival of Ramadan. There are no reports of fatalities.

A police official said protesters have a political mission and are using the question of religion as a cover to meet own political agenda.

Government spokesperson Shimels Kemal dismissed reports that the police used tear gas.

There were similar clashes last week when an African Union summit was taking place in Addis Ababa. Police then arrested 71 people including people alleged to organise and fund the “extremist group”.

Ethiopia's police accuse them of deliberately inciting violence to disrupt the African Union’s Assembly.

Addis Ababa has for months been a scene of Muslim protests who accuse the government of interference in religious affairs. An allegation Addis Ababa denies.

Ethiopian Muslims are estimated to account around 40 percent of the country’s 81 million predominantly-Christian population.

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