

News: Attacks on multiple mosques, Muslim-owned business center in Amhara region draws criticism

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Partial view of a burned mosque in Mota as was posted by Ahmedin Jebel.

Bileh Jelani

Addis Abeba, December 21/2019 – An overnight attack last night in the city of Mota, east Gojam zone of Amhara regional state, left two mosques completely burned down and two more seriously damaged after having been set on fire by a group of people. The attack also targeted a Muslim-owned business center which, according to a local police officer, was both "burned and vandalized."

Last night's act drew widespread criticisms both from the Amhara regional state Islamic Affairs Council and Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council, as well as local and federal authorities, including PM Abiy Ahmed who described the attack as "attempts by extremists to breakdown our rich history of religious tolerance and coexistence." Attorney General Berhanu Tsegaye and Addis Abeba deputy mayor Takele Uma have also joined in condemning the attacks. AG Berhanu said the government would take decisive measures against those involved in the attacks. A statement issued by National Movement of Amhara (NaMA) also denounced the act and called on calm among the young people in Mota and to support rebuild the damaged Mosques.

In a statement released late this afternoon, the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council said "Muslim-owned properties, businesses, hotels and residential houses were deliberately targeted," in the last night's attack. A video circulating on social media shows a group of people cheering and singing while what is described as one of the mosques in the city was burning to ashes.

The attack is said to have been triggered after a fire broke out in one of the churches belonging to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church, which, sustained "a partial damage" before efforts by local people put the fire under control, according to Commander Jemal Mekonnen, head of Amhara regional state police commission, community policing department. Commander Jemal said the cause of the fire at the church was not known but the Mosques were attacked by group of people as response to the fire at the Church.

Twitter post by Khayyam (@Hamoudu) from Dec 21, 2019. The tweet includes a reply and an update about a protest in Addis Ababa. The update text reads: 'Update: Addis Ababa Muslim residents who gathered in Nur Masjid (Piassa) for Dhuhur (Zuhur/ Mid Day prayer) have denounced the incidents that happened in Motta town and call for government to take action against the perpetrators. Pic cr- የኃሲ ኑረ ጃሚያ: Fb page.'

In Addition to widespread condemnation by religious leaders, local and federal authorities, there has been a protest rally by Muslim community members in Jimma city, in south-western Oromia, not far from Beshasha, the birth place of PM Abiy Ahmed. According to Ahmedin Jebel, a prominent Muslim scholar, there were also protests in Shashemene city, in west Arsi zone of Oromia regional state. Protesters have carried banners and placards denouncing the burning. There are calls from other activists and Muslim scholars for a non-violent widespread protests to denounce the burning.

On February 12 this year at least three mosques were torched in Andebet Woreda, Jera Gedu Kebele, South Gonder zone of Amhara regional state. Two days earlier on February 10, two more mosques were also burned down in Esete Mekane Selam town in south Gonder zone. AS

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