

## Clashes between Islamic groups kill 5 in Nigeria

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LAGOS, Jan 9 (Reuters) - Clashes between rival Islamic groups in the northwestern Nigerian town of Zaria killed at least five people and wounded dozens more on Friday following reports of an attack on a religious leader, residents said.

Trouble started in the university town on Tuesday after members of the radical Shi'ite Islamic Movement in Nigeria were accused of attacking the convoy of the Emir of Zaria during a procession, a charge the group denied.

Members of a rival Islamic group reacted by setting ablaze the home of a Shi'ite leader. They returned on Friday to pull the one-storey building down but were resisted by Shi'ites who had gathered to protect it, residents said.

"In the process of trying to stop them, two of our members were martyred, about three people died on the other side and about 20 were wounded," Abdulmumini Giwa, a spokesman for the Shi'ite Islamic Movement said.

Another witness said seven people died in the clashes on Friday after being shot with home-made hunting guns.

A police spokesman for Kaduna state, where Zaria is located, confirmed there had been unrest in the town but gave no further details and said the situation had been brought under control.

Residents said soldiers and riot police had been deployed.

Africa's most populous nation of 140 million people is roughly equally split between Christians and Muslims, although traditional animist beliefs underpin many people's faith.

More than 200 distinct ethnic groups generally live peacefully side by side in the West African country but there have been frequent bouts of religious unrest in the past.

The leader of the Shi'ites in Nigeria was detained by the military authorities for several years during the 1990s because of the movement's desire to establish a pure Islamic system which does not recognise political authority.

Clashes between Muslim and Christian gangs triggered by a disputed election killed hundreds of people in the central city of Jos in November, the worst unrest in the country for years. (For full Reuters Africa coverage and to have your say on the top issues, visit: <http://africa.reuters.com/> ) (Additional reporting by Felix Onuah in Abuja; Editing by Nick Tattersall)



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