

Ethiopian Protestant leader supports investigation of rampage

by [Jonathan Luxmoore](#)

March 11, 2011

Warsaw, March 11 (ENInews)--The head of Ethiopia's Lutheran church has welcomed government efforts to curb a spate of attacks on Christians in the country, but warned that political extremists were attempting to incite violence between religious communities.

"The authorities are now working intensely to ensure everything remains under control - they're investigating why this disaster occurred and promising every possible action to prevent it," said Wakseyoum Idosa, president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY).

"It's clear certain extremists are trying to use religion as an instrument for disturbing the peace and working hard to use the ensuing conflict for political ends. This is what we are hearing from people in the areas affected."

The 49-year-old Protestant pastor was speaking after touring scenes of communal violence in the western Oromia region, where Muslim groups went on a rampage against Christians on 2 March.

In an ENInews interview on 11 March, he said he had seen private homes and congregation buildings pulled down and burnt, and spoken with Evangelical Christians displaced by the violence.

He added that the Oromia regional government had now deployed troops and police, and said his church was also working with Ethiopia's Federal Islamic Supreme Council and its local representatives to restore peace.

"We're very satisfied with the co-operation given by Islamic leaders, while the government seeks to identify the causes of the violence," said Idosa, whose church makes up 19 percent of the country's 83 million population, according to the 2007 census. Thirty-four percent claiming affiliation with Sunni Islam, and 44 percent with

the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which was the official state denomination until 1974.

At least one Orthodox Christian was killed and dozens injured when thousands of Islamic protesters launched the attacks in and around Asendabo, 190 miles west of Addis Ababa, after accusing a local Christian of tearing up a copy of the Koran.

The US-based Compass Direct News agency, which monitors persecution worldwide, said on 7 March 59 churches and 28 homes had been burned, and at least 4000 Christians forced to flee.

Among buildings affected, the agency named 12 belonging to the EECMY and six Seventh-Day Adventist facilities, as well as 38 churches, a Bible school and two offices belonging to the Ethiopian Kale Hiwot church.