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Al-Qaeda claims Algeria bombings

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has claimed responsibility for two bombings in Algeria's capital which killed at least 26 people and injured more than 170 other, according to the government.

Hospital sources, however, said that the explosions near the constitutional court and a UN building on Tuesday had left about 60 people dead. A statement posted on a website said that two cars loaded with 800kg of explosives each had been used "to attack the headquarters of the international infidels' den" and the council building.



The two bombs went off within minutes of each other in the heart of the Algerian capital [AFP]

It named the two bombers as Abdul-Rahman al-Aasmi and Ami Ibrahim Abou Othman.

"This is another successful conquest ... carried out by the Knights of the Faith with their blood in defence of the wounded nation of Islam," the statement said.

Suicide bombers

The group, which was formerly known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, posted pictures of what it said were the two suicide bombers holding assault rifles.

The statement said that 60 people had been killed in the first attack and 50 in the second.

Marie Okabe, a UN spokeswoman, raised from 10 to 11 the death toll among staffers at the offices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

She said the 11 were mostly Algerians but included three foreigners.

Several UN employees were still missing, trapped under the rubble of collapsed buildings, Okabe said.

Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary-general, voiced shock and outrage at what he described as "terrorist attacks".

"Words cannot express my sense of shock, outrage and anger at the terrorist attack on the UN mission in Algiers," he said in a statement issued in Bali, Indonesia, where he is attending a climate change conference.

Suspects' statement

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Noureddine Yazid Zerhouni, Algeria's interior minister, said suspects arrested after bombings in April had identified the UN offices as among their future targets, according to a report on the official APS news agency.

Witnesses said that several victims of the explosion near the constitutional court in Ben Aknoun were students on a school bus.

Al Jazeera correspondent Hashem Ahelbarra said that the attacks came after a speech by Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's deputy leader, earlier this year in which asked attackers to target France, Spain and Algeria.

The al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb organisation has claimed responsibility for a number of bombings that have killed several people this year.

In September, a car bomb killed 37 people at a coastguard barracks in Dellys, 100km east of Algiers, two days after a suicide bomb blast targeting a convoy carrying Abdulaziz Bouteflika, Algeria's president, killed 22 people.



The bombings come weeks after attacks by an al-Qaeda inspired group [AFP]

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb was formed from the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) in January 2007, with leader Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud promising to wage a violent campaign.

The GSPC was formed in 1998 by former members of Algeria's Armed Islamic Group (GIA), which began attacking the government in 1992 after it cancelled elections an Islamic party looked set to win.

More than 150,000 people died in an ensuing decade-long civil war.

International condemnation

The US condemned Tuesday's attack on the UN buildings, with the White House saying it would support Algeria and the UN in the wake of the attacks.

"We condemn this attack on the United Nations office by these enemies of humanity who attack the innocent," Gordon Johndroe, White House spokesman, said.

Nicolas Sarkozy, France's president, condemned the attacks in the former colony as "barbaric", in a telephone call to his Algerian counterpart.

"President Sarkozy has just called president Bouteflika to express the French people's solidarity and compassion towards the Algerian people," David Martinon, presidential spokesman, said.

Source: Al Jazeera and agencies