

Attack on hotels in Tunisia kills dozens

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A gunman hiding his weapon in a beach umbrella has opened fire at a Tunisian resort, massacring 37 people.

PM Tony Abbott has condemned 'the brutal attacks' in France, Tunisia and Kuwait that killed over 60 people.

Boss beheaded in France terror attack

Suicide bomber kills 27 at Kuwait mosque

Arrested Darwin teen 'had beheading hit list'

Witnesses have recalled the sound of the lone gunman's laughter as he pulled out the weapon — hidden inside a beach umbrella — and targeted tourists, specifically the British, but also taking with him Germans, Belgians and the French. "He was laughing and joking around, like a normal guy," said one witness. "He was choosing who to shoot. Some people, he was saying to them 'you go away'. He was choosing tourists, British, French."

Video of the attack has also emerged, showing panicked witnesses running through the streets and along the beach as gunshots echo in the background.

Since the attack on two tourist hotels in the Tunisian resort district of Sousse, the Islamic State has claimed responsibility, saying the gunman, who they identified as Abu Yahya al-Qayrawani, was a "soldier of the caliphate" who had targeted enemies of the jihadist group and "dens (of ...) fornication, vice and apostasy".

Most of those killed were "subjects of states that make up the crusader alliance fighting the state of the caliphate", the group said in a statement released on Twitter, referring to the group of countries that have been bombarding its positions in the Middle East.

The carnage at the popular Mediterranean resort of Port el Kantaoui on Friday came the same day as a suicide bomber killed 27 people at a Shi'ite mosque in Kuwait and a suspected Islamist attacked a factory in France.

Speaking out against the attacks, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said he was committed to tackling the threat of global terrorism, and was making "a strong contribution at home and working closely with our partners abroad". "Australia stands in solidarity with all those affected by these atrocities," he said in a statement. "These attacks are yet another reminder that the terrorist threat is real. They strengthen our resolve to combat the threat and the evil it represents.

He later told reporters that the attack "illustrates yet again that as far as the Daesh death cult is concerned, it's coming after us". "We may not always feel that we are at war with them, but they certainly think that they are at war with us."

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said she would contact her counterparts in France, Tunisia and Kuwait to express Australia's support, AAP reported.

Mr Abbott said Australians should remain vigilant. "Our security agencies are assessing the situation for any implications for us but there is no information to suggest a higher threat to Australia as a result of these latest atrocities," he said.

Earlier, witnesses described scenes of panic after the shooting at the Riu Imperial Marhaba Hotel on the outskirts of Sousse, about 140km south of Tunis. "He had a parasol in his hand," said Rafik Chelli, the secretary of state of the Interior Ministry. "He went down to put it in the sand and then he took out his Kalashnikov and began shooting wildly."

The gunman then entered the pool area of the Imperial Marhaba hotel before moving into the building, killing people as he went.

Tourists described hearing what sounded like fireworks and then running for their lives when they realised it was gunfire. Video of the aftermath showed medics using beach chairs as stretchers to carry away people in swimsuits.

Pictures posted on social media appeared to show the body of a man face down in the sand with empty sun loungers behind him.

Elizabeth O'Brien, an Irish woman on holiday with her two sons in the resort, described how she grabbed her children and ran for their lives when they heard gunfire erupting from one of the hotels.

Gary Pine, a British tourist close to the scene of the deadly attack, said he was on the beach and heard what "we thought was firecrackers going off" about 100 metres away, followed by an explosion from the next hotel complex along. "There was a mass exodus off the beach," he told Sky News. He said his son said he had seen someone get shot on the beach.

The gunman was finally shot dead by Tunisian security forces. There were earlier reports that another attacker fled the scene but later reports said there was only one gunman. The Health Ministry said the dead included Tunisians, British, Germans and Belgians, without giving a breakdown. Another 36 have been wounded.

Most of the dead are believed to be European tourists as it is currently the month of Ramadan. Local radio reported that most of those caught up in the slaughter were British or German.

In Dublin, Foreign Minister Charles Flanagan said an Irish woman was among the dead. Tunisian Interior Ministry spokesman Mohammed Ali Aroui said: "A terrorist infiltrated the buildings from the back before opening fire on the residents of the hotel, including foreigners and Tunisians." Sousse, some 150 kilometres from Tunis, is a popular resort for both Tunisians and Europeans.

An exchange of fire followed between the attacker and security guards, according to the report. State television said shots were fired on a beach in front of a hotel.

Global call ... Tunisia's President Beji Caid Essebsi (2nd-R), Prime Minister Habib Essid (2nd-L) and Interior minister Mohamed Najem Gharsalli (L) arrive in the resort town of Sousse. Picture: AFP
Source: AFP

Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi called for a unified global strategy. "We note that Tunisia faces an international movement. It cannot respond alone to this. On the same day at the same time France has been the target of such an operation, and Kuwait too," Mr Essebsi said. "This proves the

need for a global strategy, and that all democratic countries must now join forces. This is worse than terrible." I hope this is the last time, because we are determined to take the most painful measures to deal with an even more painful scourge," he said.

Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab Spring, has seen a surge in radical Islam since veteran president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted in the 2011 revolution.



He said guests at his hotel were first told to lock themselves in their rooms, and later to gather in the lobby.

Tunisia has stepped up security since March when gunmen killed a policeman and 21 tourists, including an Australian-Colombian dual national and his Colombian mother, at the Bardo museum in the Tunisian capital.

The Islamic State extremist group claimed responsibility for the March attack.

Treasurer Joe Hockey said the Australian national security committee would meet on Saturday and the attacks were a reminder of the risk of terrorist attacks anywhere in the world. "That's why we're working so hard to put all the resources in that we can to defeat these evil bastards at their source," told reporters in Melbourne on the sidelines of the Liberal Party federal council.

No Australians are believed to have been caught up in the attacks, but those worried about family or friends should contact the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.