

Beat: News

NINE ARRESTED IN TUNISIA MUSEUM ATTACK

TUNISIAN PRESIDENT'S OFFICE ANNOUNCED

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USPA NEWS - Nine people have been arrested in connection with a shooting attack on a museum in Tunisia that left 23 people dead, Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi's office announced Thursday.

Four of the suspects were directly connected with the attack at the National Bardo Museum on Wednesday, Essebsi said.

Five suspects are accused of having ties to the terrorist cell involved in the tragedy. The president's office said the army will be deployed to protect large cities, Reuters reported.

The arrests came after Tunisia's prime minister said one of the gunmen who stormed the museum was known to intelligence services. Habib Essid said in an interview with French radio station RTL that the North African nation is working with other countries to find out more about the attackers, the Associated Press reported. Two gunmen, identified as Yassine Laabidi and Hatem Khachnaoui, were killed when authorities swept in and freed the hostages.

Essid said Laabidi was flagged to intelligence, although not for "anything special." No formal links to any particular terror group have been established, the AP said.

Health Minister Said Aidi said Thursday that the death toll rose to 23 people, including 18 foreign tourists and the two gunmen, and almost 50 people were wounded. Five Tunisians were killed, including the attackers. Aidi said all the injuries were from bullet wounds, the AP reported.

The National Bardo Museum is a popular tourist attraction in the capital Tunis, and a manhunt was underway for two or three accomplices after the gunmen were killed.

Two Spanish tourists and a Tunisian museum worker spent the night hiding in the building before being found by security forces, according to media reports Thursday. The employee hid the man and woman in an office during the four-hour siege, the AFP news agency reported. A civil protection official who was outside the museum told the agency that the three were taken to a hospital for medical checks.

Tunisia's President Beji Caid Essebsi on Thursday said the country is in a "war with terror." In comments broadcast on national TV, he said: "These monstrous minorities do not frighten us. We will resist them until the deepest end without mercy. Democracy will win and it will survive."

Two of the cruise ships whose passengers were among the victims sailed out of the port of Tunis early on Thursday. MSC Cruises said nine passengers from the Splendida were killed, 12 injured and six unaccounted-for, according to the AP. The Costa Fascinosa said 13 passengers had not returned on board when the ship left the port, the news agency reported.

Foreign tourists from countries including Japan, Italy, Britain, Australia, Poland and France were killed, along with Tunisian nationals. The wounded include tourists from Italy, France, Japan, South Africa, Poland, and Russia, authorities said.

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