

ABC Radio Australia

East Timor denies violent protests outside Australian embassy, amid spying row

Updated 7 December 2013, 11:33 AEST

By Peter Lloyd

The government of East Timor has been forced into damage control amid reports police used tear gas on a crowd of protesters staging a demonstration outside the Australian Embassy in Dili.

East Timor has rejected reports about violent protests outside the Australian embassy in Dili.

The Agence France Press (AFP) news agency reported on Thursday that local riot police used tear gas to drive back 100 protesters from the front gate of the embassy.

The protest comes after East Timor expressed outrage over reports that Australia secretly recorded Timorese ministers during negotiations on an oil and gas revenue-sharing deal in 2004.

The AFP later downgraded the number of protesters to 20, but maintains that tear gas was used.

But East Timor's secretary of state for security, Francisco Guterres, denies any use of force.

"This is contrary to reports. The police did not need to work with any means of force, especially the tear gas," he told ABC's AM program.

"There was no tear gas released or used when the police were in that kind of a demonstration."

Audio: Timor AM audio (AM) (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-12-07/timor-denies-firing-tear-gas-at-protestors/5142154>)

Mr Guterres's office earlier released a statement which also denied any use of force.

"There were no rocks thrown by this peaceful group at either peaceful gathering," the statement said.

"There were no acts of aggression towards any member of the public, or the diplomatic corps by this peaceful group and this peaceful group posed no risk to public order," said a statement from the Secretary of State for Security.

"The Australian Embassy asked the Dili police to ensure the protestors acted within agreed diplomatic regulations – the protestors; therefore, were moved across the street and dispersed shortly after.

"I am sure the embassy of Australia in Dili will be happy to rectify the story that has reached global recognition on an unprecedented scale given the events that actually occurred."

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