

German Easter Demos Focus on Deadly Afghan Clashes

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Frankfurt- Peace activists held traditional Easter protest rallies across Germany on Saturday, focusing on the latest clashes in Afghanistan, in which three German soldiers and at least five Afghan soldiers were killed.

The deaths were blamed on the government's "cynical and short- sighted politics," in a statement issued by the central office coordinating the Easter demonstrations.

"Troop withdrawal must begin immediately," the protest organizers wrote, adding that this was the only way peaceful reconstruction could take place.

At least 30 protests took place across the country - marking the 50th year of the Easter demonstrations. The peace movement also demanded the abolition of all nuclear weapons and an end to German arms exports.

An estimated 1,200 gathered for a rally in the Bavarian capital, Munich, according to the organizers. Another 500 peace activists took part in a Dusseldorf demonstration, police said. In Stuttgart, 750 people took to the streets.

A minor skirmish occurred in the eastern city of Leipzig, where six people tried to join a rally, wearing the blue helmets of the former East German FDJ youth organization. The issue was resolved when they placed stickers over the "FDJ" emblem.

At least 450 other people took part in marches, in towns including Wiesbaden, Bremen, Ramstein and Duisburg. Germany's Easter marches date back 50 years, after starting in 1960 based on British peace activists campaigning against nuclear weapons. Since the end of the Cold War, interest in the marches has waned.

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