

NY police kill man on wedding day

An unarmed man has been shot dead by police in New York City hours before he was to have been married, prompting fury over the officers' actions.

Two of the man's friends were hurt in the shooting, which occurred outside a strip club where they had been celebrating before the wedding.

Police fired 50 bullets at a car carrying the men after it reportedly struck an unmarked police vehicle.

New York's mayor says police had acted fearing an armed "altercation".

"Officers on the scene had reason to believe that an altercation involving a firearm was about to happen and were trying to stop it," Michael Bloomberg said.

The club was under surveillance because of its long history of weapons complaints, drug-dealing and prostitution, New York's Police Chief Raymond Kelly said.

Civil rights activist Al Sharpton has demanded the police explain its actions.

"Gunshots all over the place. This is outrageous at best," he said.

He also criticised the police for handcuffing the two men receiving emergency care for their injuries in hospital.

Denise Ford, the mother of one of the men hurt in the shooting, is quoted as saying her son was shot in the hand, right leg and buttocks.

"I think this is messed-up on the cops' behalf," Ms Ford told New York newspaper Newsday.

"They're too hotheaded and something needs to be done about it."

Police suspicions

A total of 21 bullets hit the car the men were in as they left the strip club, police said.

The driver, Sean Bell, was to be married later on Saturday. He was pronounced dead on arrival at hospital.

One of his passengers, Joseph Guzman was hit by at least 11 bullets and is in a critical condition in hospital.

The other passenger, Trent Benefield, was hit three times and is in a stable condition.

Police Chief Kelly said the three men were also being watched.

He said an undercover officer at the club had reported that the men were in a group that was involved in a dispute with another person outside the club.

The officer had reportedly called his colleagues saying he feared a gun would be produced.

As the men left the scene, a car they were driving struck an undercover officer on the shin.

It also hit an unmarked police vehicle, which is when five of the seven police officers on the scene opened fire, Mr Kelly said.

No weapons were found on the three men or in their car. An investigation is under way.

In 1999, New York police fired 41 bullets at unarmed Amadou Diallo, killing him. The four officers involved were acquitted of all charges.