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Haiti / Dominican Republic: Deaths continue as MINUSTAH fails to protect civilians

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According to eye-witness accounts provided to Amnesty International, at least one civilian died and another was injured yesterday in the locality of Ouanaminthe (on the Haitian-Dominican Republic border), after shots were allegedly fired from a convoy consisting of a Dominican truck accompanied by vehicles from the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

The crowd was demonstrating as the bodies of more than 20 Haitians -- who died after being illegally trafficked to the Dominican Republic -- were being taken to the Ouanaminthe cemetery to be buried.

The demonstrators wanted to prevent the burying of the bodies in a mass grave without a proper identification of the victims or a formal ceremony. They threw rocks at the truck transporting the bodies and at MINUSTAH vehicles escorting it. According to the eye-witnesses, none of the civilians demonstrating was armed.

Furthermore, a second person was reportedly injured when hit by a MINUSTAH armoured vehicle. There are also reports that several MINUSTAH peacekeepers were injured.

Two journalists from a local radio station were physically prevented from covering the events and had their tape recorders confiscated by MINUSTAH personnel.

Amnesty International is calling on MINUSTAH officials and the Haitian government to launch an urgent, independent investigation into this incident and to make the conclusions public. Those found responsible for using or ordering excessive force should be brought to justice.

MINUSTAH has been deployed in Haiti since June 2004. According to reports, MINUSTAH officials recently admitted that an internal investigation concluded that a number of unarmed civilians may have been killed during a UN operation in Cité Soleil on 6 July 2005. Amnesty International urges UN officials to make public its findings.

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