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Indonesia: Police Head must investigate excessive use of force by Nabire police

Amnesty International urges the National Head of Police, Bambang Hendarso Danuri to initiate an immediate investigation into reports of police using excessive force to disperse a demonstration in Nabire, Papua. This is the third reported incident of such abuses by the Nabire police force since December 2008.

On 6 April 2009, police opened fire on a protest demonstration in Indonesia's remote Papua region, injuring at least seven people. According to local sources, four are currently in critical condition in hospital, including a 10 year-old student who was shot as he was returning from school. A police officer was also injured by an arrow. The police arrested at least 15 political activists for "rebellion" prior to the demonstration, who are believed to still be detained.

The 200 demonstrators had called for the boycott of upcoming parliamentary elections and investigations into past human rights violations in Papua. They also celebrated the launch of the International Lawyers for West Papua (ILWP) in the United States in early April 2009.

Amnesty International recognizes the challenges involved in policing demonstrations. However, opening fire on protestors may contravene the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials. These state that force should be used only as a last resort, in proportion to the threat posed, and should be designed to minimize damage or injury.

Amnesty International urges that an impartial and independent inquiry into all three incidents in Nabire be carried out; with a review of police tactics and weapons in the policing of demonstrations. The authorities should make the findings and recommendations public in a timely manner.

The Indonesian authorities should discipline and bring to justice those involved if the force used is found to have been excessive and to have contravened the principles of necessity and proportionality. They should also put in place measures and training to ensure that future policing operations comply with international standards.

Background

On 4 December 2008, police used disproportionate and excessive force against Papuan Kingmi church protestors. On 29 January 2009, police violently dispersed a demonstration calling for local elections to be held without delay in Nabire. In both cases, police kicked and beat the demonstrators with rattan sticks and rifle butts. Rubber bullets were also used, injuring at least four in the first case and five in the second. Amnesty International is not aware of any investigation into these incidents.

Amnesty International has also received information that police raided and ransacked the office of the Papuan Customary Council on 3 April 2009. They arrested 15 people and confiscated documents, a laptop, mobile phones and various other materials from the office. The police claimed they found two guns in the office. In another incident on the same day, they arrested two political activists from Jayapura harbour. While 14 have been released, 3 political activists from the West Papua National Committee (KNPB) remain in police custody for "rebellion".

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