

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Poland: Concerns over large-scale prosecution of protesters**

On Saturday, 10 June the police removed by force about hundred anti-government protesters in central Warsaw. They were held for two hours and were served fines for an interference with a lawful assembly. As the protesters refused to pay the fines arguing they were exercising their right to freedom of assembly, the police took their ID details and informed them they will be subjected to further proceedings under the Act on Offences.

A team from Amnesty International Poland was monitoring the policing of the protests on 10 June. The monitoring [report \(in Polish\)](#) concluded that although no excessive use of force by the police was observed, there are serious concerns over access of protesters to the site of legal demonstration. The report also raises concerns over the fact that protesters were held for a period of time which impacted their ability to exercise their right to assembly.

Amnesty International was informed by a number of protesters apprehended by the police that the police checked their ID and they were questioned on their private lives.

“It was completely strange, you go on the street to protest and you end up being asked about your marital status, number of children, your income, the number of persons living in your household,” one of the affected activists from *Strajk kobiet* (Women’s Strike) told Amnesty International.

91 protesters were then asked to pay a fine for disturbing a legal assembly. The majority, 80 persons, refused to accept the fine and now face further proceedings. In addition, about a dozen protesters face criminal charges for a “malicious interference with a religious act”. The grounds for these charges, according to the police, were an attempt by these protesters to block a religious procession organized every month in the centre of Warsaw to commemorate the Smolensk plane crash during which the president Lech Kaczynski and 95 other people died. The protesters regularly hold a counter-assembly to express their disagreement with the messages of the pro-government procession and assembly.

Another person, a former dissident and activist of the movement *Solidarnosc*, Władysław Frasyniuk has been charged with “violation of bodily integrity of a public official”. A video obtained by Amnesty International shows him being removed by police to one of the side streets with the other protesters where he was held for two hours. The video shows the police officers holding him by his arms and him trying to free himself by shrugging the officers off.

In April 2017 an amendment of the Law on Assemblies entered into force under which the pro-government assembly is specifically protected. According to the law, it represents a “cyclical demonstration” organized by the same entity on the same location several times a year and has a priority over anybody else on a given location. This way, the counter-protesters are prevented by the law to hold an assembly in front of the Presidential Palace where the pro-government demonstrations are held. However, they were permitted by the District Court in Warsaw to hold their assembly on the other side of the street in the vicinity of the Palace. Despite this, the police sealed off the entire street by the barriers and prevented counter-protest to be held in the area granted by the court.

Amnesty International is concerned over the use of criminal and administrative law against protesters in Poland. It calls on the Polish authorities to ensure that people are able to take part in demonstrations as a means of expressing their views.

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