

ZAMBIA: Police shooting of opposition leaders needs urgent investigation

Zambian President Frederick Chiluba should immediately order a thorough investigation into this weekend's police shooting which left two opposition leaders injured, Amnesty International's Secretary General Pierre Sané said today.

The statement came after police snipers fired at two opposition leaders as they attempted to leave a political rally on 23 August. The bullets grazed the head of former president Kenneth Kaunda, who is now the leader of the United National Independence Party (UNIP), and struck Liberal Progressive Front leader Roger Chongwe in the cheek and neck.

Several others people were also injured by police, who apparently used live ammunition and tear gas to disperse a crowd of hundreds of people, arrested 21 people and destroyed the podium at the rally site. According to Amnesty International, this was just the latest incidence of the Zambian police failing to act in a politically neutral manner.

"The lack of impartial and independent investigations into past police shootings contributes to a perception -- by the Zambian public and by police officers themselves -- that the police enjoy impunity from investigations that might lead to the punishment of misconduct," Mr Sané said in his letter to President Chiluba.

"This incident appears even more grave in the context of police use of excessive force to quell demonstrations, the suppression of the media's freedom of expression and the lack of investigation into such police shootings," Mr Sané continued.

The Zambian authorities enforced a 24-hour news blackout on the state-run Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation. Police also arrested Masautso Phiri of *The Post*, who took pictures at the rally. According to witnesses, police smashed Phiri's camera, destroyed the film and roughed him up in an effort to punish him for taking pictures of the police exerting excessive force on the public.

"A thorough investigation into these shootings must begin as soon as possible, and the outcome of such an investigation should also be published to ensure transparency and accountability," Mr Sané said.

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