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Indonesia: At least six students shot dead - how far will security forces go?

Today's shooting of at least six students by Indonesian security forces at a demonstration in West Jakarta confirms just how far the government is willing to go to silence student protesters, Amnesty International said today.

"This goes beyond maintaining order -- it shows contempt for human life," the organization stated.

The shootings occurred at around 5.30 pm at Trisakti University in West Jakarta, Indonesia. Thousands of students had staged a peaceful demonstration just outside the university which turned violent when some students began to beat a plainclothes security forces officer. The police reportedly began firing live ammunition, tear gas, and charging students with batons. Gun shots are also believed to have come from security force vehicles and nearby buildings. Witnesses reportedly saw police with rifles aimed directly at fleeing students. At least five students were shot dead and there are reports of up to 15 dead. At least 10 people are wounded -- some seriously -- and being treated at a nearby hospital.

The shootings come as Amnesty International launched an appeal -- which will be disseminated in Indonesia in the national language tomorrow -- to the Indonesian Armed Forces to act with restraint. Riots and demonstrations in recent weeks have resulted in frequent reports of excessive and lethal force being used by the security forces.

The Indonesian security forces have a poor record in dealing with both peaceful dissent and violent confrontations frequently resorting to excessive physical force rather than acceptable crowd control techniques to break up gatherings and protests.

"Governments which have provided military training and equipment to the Indonesian security forces -- aware of the way in which dissent has been dealt with in the past -- must bear some responsibility for today's tragic events," Amnesty International said.

"The killings at Trisakti University underline the urgent need for the international community to demonstrate its support for those Indonesians who are campaigning for reforms which will protect basic human rights, including the right to life," the organization said. "Now is the time to draw the line, not after further tragic loss of life."

Amnesty International is calling on other governments to condemn the killings, urge that orders are immediately given to avoid the use of force or firearms, and for there to be an immediate impartial and full investigation into today's events.

Human rights monitors, families of the victims and witnesses must be free from harassment and intimidation and the authorities must not take any actions to hinder the full and impartial investigation into the events, Amnesty International added.

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For a copy of Amnesty International's appeal to the armed forces, please contact the research team on: +44 171 413 5661/5658 or the Press Office on: +44 171 413 5566/5810. *ISDN line available.*