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Turkey: Police actions against demonstrators must be investigated

Amnesty International called for a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation into the circumstances of law enforcement officials' use of excessive force against a group of demonstrators at a university campus in Ankara on 18 December 2012. Amnesty International is concerned about reports that one of the demonstrators is in hospital in a serious condition having suffered a brain haemorrhage after a gas canister fired by police hit him on the head.

On 18 December 2012 Prime Minister Erdoğan visited the Middle East Technical University (Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi - ODTÜ) for the ceremony at the campus for the launch of the Göktürk 2 satellite. According to eyewitness accounts and media reports, around 300 demonstrators gathered to stage a peaceful demonstration shouting slogans and carrying signs protesting against a number of government policies and the imprisonment of people for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that there was a heavy police presence with over 3000 law enforcement officials, and around 100 armoured vehicles. Eyewitnesses also told Amnesty International that on seeing the police barricade, demonstrators stopped marching, but continued to shout slogans. Eyewitnesses alleged that police began to fire sound bombs and pepper spray into the crowd without warning. It is alleged by students that clashes continued for almost seven hours and nearly 2000 used gas canisters were collected and approximately 70 sound bombs were counted.

Some demonstrators responded by throwing stones and bottles at the police. Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that six or seven law enforcement officials were subsequently seen at Ankara Atatürk Hospital, suspected of having sustained light injuries.

One of the demonstrators, Barış Barışık, who is a member of the Student Collective (Öğrenci Kolektifi) is still in hospital. He was hit in the head by a pepper spray canister fired by police and is being treated at the Ankara University Training and Research Hospital for a brain haemorrhage. Eyewitness and media reports state that up to 50 demonstrators were injured, three of them including Barış Barışık seriously.

Amnesty International urges the Turkish authorities to ensure that police do not use excessive force against peaceful demonstrators, in line with the state's obligations under Articles 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the rights to freedom of expression and assembly and to which Turkey is a signatory.

Amnesty International calls on Turkish authorities to conduct a prompt, thorough and independent investigation into the use of excessive force by police on 18 December 2012.

Background information

The Göktürk 2 satellite is Turkey's first observation satellite, and was launched from the Jiuquan launch base in China. Prime Minister Erdoğan was at the ODTÜ campus to watch the launch live from the TÜBİTAK Space Technology Research Institute at the ODTÜ campus.

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