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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - URUGUAY (This item is being sent to media in Uruguay by the research team)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Brazil - 14 September - PLEASE NOTE THIS IS AN INTERNATIONAL RELEASE. SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

Kosovo - 19 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

Indonesia - 28 September - LAUNCH OF CAMPAIGN

Algeria - first week of October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

France - 12 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Yemen - 1 September - See news service 194/94

Thailand - 6 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 184/94

Togo - 15 September - See news service 168/94

Turkey - 14 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 181/94

News Service 201/94

AI INDEX: AMR 52/WU 02/94
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URUGUAY: AI CONCERNED AT APPARENT EXCESS FORCE BY POLICE DURING DEMONSTRATION AGAINST EXTRADITIONS

Amnesty International is appealing to the Uruguayan government to carry out a thorough investigation into the apparent excessive use of force by Uruguayan police against demonstrators in Montevideo last week.

Riot police charged and fired on demonstrators protesting the extradition of three alleged members of the armed Basque group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) from Uruguay to Spain on 24 August. One demonstrator was killed and at least 75 people -- including police -- were injured.

An investigation into the incident has been announced by the Minister of the Interior and Amnesty International has requested information about its terms of reference.

"It is essential that the facts are promptly and rigorously investigated by an impartial and independent body and that the results are made public," Amnesty International said.

The investigation should determine whether the use of force by police during the operation was excessive and disproportionate, according to international principles which regulate the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials.

"Although we understand that some of the demonstrators may have been armed, we are concerned at the alarming number of defenceless civilians who sustained injuries, apparently as a result of gunfire and beatings. This suggests that police used excessive and disproportionate force in dealing with the demonstration", Amnesty International said.

Twenty-four year-old Alvaro Fernando Morroni was shot and killed during the demonstration, and a member of the emergency medical services was in a critical condition after he was reportedly shot in the back while attending to an injured demonstrator. One man was seriously wounded after suffering two bullet wounds in the head and many other demonstrators, among them children, claimed to have been beaten, trampled and indiscriminately shot at by police.

The demonstration was the culmination of mass protests in Uruguay against the extraditions, which were carried out that night. Concerned that the men could be at risk of ill-treatment and other abuses on arrival in Spain, Amnesty International made repeated calls to the Uruguayan authorities to obtain from the Spanish government, before the extradition went ahead, certain guarantees for the protection of the men.

The Uruguayan Minister of External Affairs informed Amnesty International late last week that he had raised concerns about the possible ill-treatment of the three men in Spain with his Spanish counterpart who had "provided the utmost guarantees a state governed by the rule of law can offer".

On arrival in Spain, the three men ended their hunger strike and were taken to a prison hospital, where their statements were taken by a judge of the Audiencia Nacional.

"It is ironic that, while the Uruguayan government has taken welcome steps to safeguard against ill-treatment in Spain, its own police appear to have had little concern about using excessive force on Uruguayan civilians during the demonstration," Amnesty International said.

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