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## **Dominican Republic: Student's killing underscores urgent need for police reform**

The Dominican Republic's National Police must urgently address how it responds to public protests as part of a comprehensive policing reform in the Caribbean nation, Amnesty International said after a university student was shot dead in the capital Santo Domingo on Thursday.

Willy Florián Ramírez, a 21-year-old medical student, died after being shot on Thursday during clashes between police and student protesters demonstrating against a highly disputed tax reform which had led to demonstrations across the country in previous days.

According to eyewitnesses, police shot Florián while he was walking out of the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD) campus. Heavily armed police officers were firing live rounds towards a group of protesters who were making their way from the campus to join another demonstration at the Congress. Clashes then erupted between students and the police.

On Thursday night the National Police chief announced the arrest of 19 police officials – including a lieutenant colonel in charge of the operation – as part of an investigation into the incident.

“This tragic incident confirms the need for the kind of comprehensive police reform in the Dominican Republic that Amnesty International and local human rights organizations have long been advocating,” said Javier Zúñiga, Special Adviser to Amnesty International.

“Amnesty International welcomes that the President of the Republic requested a full and timely investigation into Willy Florián's killing. His tragic death should lead to urgent measures to prevent more unlawful killings in the future.

“While the police have a duty to maintain public order during protests, excessive force must never be used, and lethal arms should be used as the very last resort only in self-defence or the defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury.”

Eyewitnesses said that after Florián was shot, police fired tear gas at people who tried to come to his aid.

Police officials meanwhile claim a video from the demonstration shows one of the masked protesters firing a gun at police, who responded by firing shots in the air and using tear gas to disperse the protesters.

Two police officers as well as at least three other students and a bus ticket collector were also reportedly injured in the clashes.

According to a National Police statement, a bullet extracted from Florián's corpse has been sent for forensic analysis, to compare it with those used by the police agents who responded to the protests near

the UASD.

Following the violence, the university has suspended all classes until next Monday, 12 November.

### **Endemic police abuse**

Amnesty International believes Florián's killing should give Dominican authorities pause to reflect on how the country's police have been allowed to violate human rights continually with impunity.

The organization has previously documented soaring levels of abuse by police in the Dominican Republic, including torture and unlawful killings.

An October 2011 report cited scores of cases of individuals who had been killed by police – a tenth of all murders in the country the previous year were the result of police abuse.

Too many people are killed or injured by police during demonstrations. In a separate protest on Thursday in the city of Barahona, members of the National Police reportedly shot and seriously injured a female professor. An investigation is also currently under way into the alleged police role in the deaths of four people during protests in Salcedo, near the northern city of Santiago, in June 2012.

“When the Dominican Congress debates the new Organic Law of the National Police in the coming weeks, they must integrate principles and rules ensuring that the police really protect human rights,” said Zúñiga.

An Amnesty International delegation will travel to the Dominican Republic at the end of the month.

“We look forward to discussing with the President and other relevant authorities ways to implement a comprehensive reform to transform the police into an institution that is respectful of human rights and able to provide the effective protection that people in the Dominican Republic desperately need,” said Zúñiga.