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India: 14 protesters shot dead in escalating Kashmir violence

Security forces in Jammu and Kashmir should not use live ammunition except as a last resort to protect against a threat to life, Amnesty International said today.

At least 14 protesters have been killed in shootings by security forces during protests in Kashmir over the last four days. More than 150 people have been injured, including 22 security personnel, in some of the most violent clashes between protesters and security forces in recent years in the restive Kashmir valley.

“Some of the recent demonstrations have turned violent, but the security forces should still respect and protect the right to life at all times,” said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Director.

Security forces should use firearms only where unavoidable to protect life, and to the minimum extent required, in compliance with their own manual and international law and standards, including the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

“The number and circumstances of fatal shootings suggest that this has not always been the case,” said Sam Zarifi.

From Friday 30 July to Sunday 1 August, nine protestors were killed by gunfire from the Jammu and Kashmir state police and the Central Reserve Police Force during demonstrations. Five more deaths have been reported today, including one demonstrator who succumbed to gunshot injuries sustained on Saturday.

Violence by protestors in recent demonstrations has included attacks on a train station and three police stations. Four people died in an explosion when a police station in Khrew, near Srinagar, was set on fire by protestors on Sunday.

Amnesty International recognizes the duty and responsibility of the authorities to protect the public, public property and officials from attack, and to investigate and prosecute those suspected of committing a recognizable criminal offence. The right to freedom of assembly protects only peaceful assembly. Protestors who engage in human rights abuses must be held accountable for their actions.

Similarly, according to international law, all incidents of police shootings should be investigated promptly, independently, impartially and thoroughly. Members of security forces suspected of violating human rights, irrespective of rank, should be prosecuted in proceedings that meet international standards of fairness. Survivors and families of victims should be provided with reparations.