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Kenya: Triple killing by police must be investigated

Amnesty International has called on the Kenyan authorities to properly investigate the apparently unprovoked killing of three men by police on a busy Nairobi highway yesterday.

Reports indicate that the trio were shot dead after being ordered from their car during a traffic jam by plain clothes police, who claimed the men were armed criminals killed in a shoot-out with police officers. However, eyewitnesses reported that the slain men were compliant and had already surrendered to the police.

Authorities said today that three police officers allegedly involved in the shooting have been suspended, pending an investigation.

"The Kenyan authorities have repeatedly promised investigations into police shootings in the past, but they rarely materialise and this has bred a culture of unlawful killings by police who are never held accountable," said Justus Nyang'aya, Director of Amnesty International Kenya.

"Eyewitness reports of this incident depict a disturbing image of police officers who are accustomed to acting with complete impunity. These appear to be blatant and deliberate killings that amount to extrajudicial executions."

Eyewitnesses reported in Kenyan media that the police had stepped out of their car on Lang'ata road, Nairobi and aimed guns at the three men who were in a car just ahead of them.

The men complied with police instructions while holding up their hands, before the police shot all three of them at close range. Police reportedly said that the officers "were acting on a tip-off". Eyewitnesses dispute the police's assertion that the three were attempting to evade arrest.

Photos printed in Kenya's Daily Nation newspaper, taken on a mobile phone by a passing motorist, show police pointing guns at two men lying face-down. Another photo shows two men with bullet wounds to the head, apparently dead.

Under international law enforcement standards, intentional lethal use of firearms is allowed only if strictly unavoidable to protect life.

"There must be a prompt, thorough, impartial and independent investigation into these killings and any police officers identified as responsible for participating in them must be brought to justice in a way that complies with international fair trial standards," said Justus Nyang'aya.

"The Kenyan government must ensure that arbitrary or abusive use of firearms by its law enforcement officials is punished as a criminal offence."