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## **Tunisia: Security forces must be held accountable for killing protesters**

Amnesty International has today called for immediate independent investigations as it released a report detailing unlawful killings and acts of brutality by Tunisian security forces during the protests in December and January that led to the departure of former President Ben Ali.

The 46-page report [\*Tunisia in Revolt: State Violence during Anti Government Protests\*](#) reveals that security forces shot bystanders and fleeing protesters and fired live ammunition at protesters who did not pose a threat to their lives, nor that of others.

"The security forces acted with reckless disregard for human life in all too many cases," said Malcolm Smart, Director of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa programme.

"The new government must ensure that killings and serious allegations of abuse by the security forces are fully and independently investigated without delay, and that those responsible are held to account.

"This is an essential first step in turning the page on the long years of abuses under the former president.

"Such investigations must provide Tunisians with the truth, and the victims with both justice and reparation."

People detained by the security forces were also systematically beaten or subjected to other ill-treatment, according to evidence gathered for the report by an Amnesty International fact-finding team that visited Tunisia between 14 and 23 January.

Seasonal worker Ghassan Chniti, 19, was fatally shot as he ran away from police in the small city of Thala in central Tunisia, youths who were with him said.

A doctor confirmed he was shot from behind after examining his corpse at Kasserine Hospital.

Chniti was one of five people killed by live ammunition in Thala on 8 January as skirmishes broke out between protesters and police.

His father told Amnesty International: "My son worked and got paid about 150 dinars a month [70 euros] to help out the whole family. He went to participate in the protest...Our income is not enough to feed the family."

Malek Habbachi, 24, who had recently become engaged, was killed by a single bullet to his neck on the evening of 12 January in the Tadhoun neighbourhood, one of the largest and poorest suburbs of Tunis. He was shot by a sniper, eyewitnesses said.

Riot police wielding batons hit Malek's brother Yousri on his head, back and legs as he tried to carry Malek home.

Malek Habbachi's father said that he had joined the protests to call for better life opportunities: "All Tunisian people refuse to accept their living conditions. Malek was fighting against corruption."

Malek Habbachi's sister, who is studying law, told Amnesty International researchers, "We want justice," a call echoed by most victims' families.

New incidents of violence took place on 5 February when security forces in the city of Kef opened fire on protesters calling for the resignation of the local police chief whom they accused of abusing power.

Police shot dead two people among protesters who they said were trying to break into the police station.

Amnesty International called on the caretaker authorities to allow Tunisians to express their opinions and participate in peaceful protests without fear of injury or arbitrary arrest.

"After the long years of repression under President Ben Ali, the Tunisian authorities must now take concrete steps to rein in the security forces and instill a culture of human rights within the police force, in particular," said Malcolm Smart.

"The authorities must make it clear in both law and in practice that nobody is above the law. They must show that those responsible for unlawful killings, excessive force, torture or other abuses are held fully to account."

An Amnesty International delegation visited Tunisia from 14 to 23 January, meeting with families of those killed in the unrest, individuals injured during protests, other witnesses, and former detainees, as well as lawyers, Human Rights Defenders, trade unionists and medical professionals. Researchers travelled to Hammamat, Bizerte, Regueb, Thala and Kasserine.

The current caretaker government says that 78 people died during the protests, with a further 100 injured. Tunisian human rights organizations say the real death toll was greater and the UN has put it at 147 in addition to the 72 people who died in prison in incidents linked to the unrest. Most of the killings are believed to have been committed by the Public Order Brigade (Brigade de l'Ordre Publique, BOP).