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Bahrain witnesses describe bloody crackdown

The worst violence happened in the early hours of 17 February, when massed ranks of riot police stormed Pearl Roundabout to evict the protesters.

Tanks blocked access to the roundabout as police used live ammunition, tear gas, batons, rubber bullets and shotguns to disperse the crowd.

One witness told Amnesty International that riot police were shooting from different angles, including from a bridge over the roundabout, while protesters desperately ran for cover.

18-year-old medical student Khadija Ahmed, who was volunteering at an informal medical clinic at the roundabout told Amnesty International researchers she heard shots after 0300hrs on 17 February:

“Some injured arrived at the tent straight away with tear gas problems. Then police threw or fired two tear gas canisters inside the tent and pulled the flap down. People were crying ‘Save me, save me from them’.”

Her twin sister Zeinab said: “People were shouting ‘Salmiya, Salmiya, We are peaceful don’t attack’... One of the police was shouting at me and another was hitting my dad, really hard with a stick, who was trying to protect me.”

Five people died after the raid on Pearl roundabout including 'Isa 'Abdulhassan, aged 60, who died instantaneously after being shot in the head. Medical evidence seen by Amnesty International indicates that he was probably shot from within two metres.

More than 10 medical professionals told Amnesty International they were attacked by riot police as they tried to treat injured people on 17 February.

Dr Sadeq al-'Ekri, a surgeon, told Amnesty International that police stopped him, tied his hands behind his back, forced him onto a bus, pulled his trousers down and then punched and beat him with sticks all over his body, including his genitals.

Officers later threatened him, including with sexual abuse, while the beatings continued.

“These physical injuries will disappear but the psychological damage will not... I didn’t believe that this would happen in Bahrain,” said Dr Sadeq al-'Ekri.

Ambulances were blocked from entering the roundabout for about four hours from 0630hrs.

Paramedic Jamil 'Abdullah Ebrahim was in a convoy of five ambulances stopped by riot police at around 0830hrs. He told Amnesty International that police pulled him out and started beating him.

“About a dozen were there, beating me with sticks, black wooden sticks about 60cm long. Some took off their helmets to hit me with them.”

After enduring a five-minute assault, Jamil 'Abdullah Ebrahim found a colleague with blood

pouring down his face. Officers had hit him over the head with a rifle butt and threatened him: "If you come back I will kill you".

"It is totally unjustifiable that ambulances were blocked and medical staff attacked as they attempted to treat injured protesters. It raises serious questions about the orders given to riot police that must be urgently investigated," said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Programme Director.