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Jordan: Impartial investigation into 15 July demonstration violence needed

Amnesty International today called on the Jordanian authorities to ensure that the next phase of the investigation into the reported use of excessive force against demonstrators and journalists during a protest in Amman on 15 July 2011 is carried out by a body that is fully independent and impartial and will be perceived as such.

In a letter sent today to Minister of Interior Mazen Al Saket, Amnesty International welcomed the recent publication of the preliminary findings of an investigation panel set up by the Public Security Directorate (PSD) and a number of its recommendations, including an extended time frame for the investigation, but also expressed concern about the impartiality of the panel, which appears to be seriously undermined by the fact that two of its three members appear directly responsible for some of the police forces under investigation.

Amnesty International carefully considered the findings of the preliminary report and, on the basis of its own research into the events of 15 July and international law enforcement standards such as the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, has called on the next phase of the investigation to examine a number of issues in greater depth.

According to the panel's report both protesters and media personnel were injured because the protesters attacked and insulted the security forces present, two of whom appear to have been injured critically, because there were existing tensions as a result of previous clashes and because security forces were unable to distinguish between journalists and demonstrators. Amnesty International does not believe that any of these points excuse in any way the use of force against those demonstrating peacefully or reporting on the events. Eyewitnesses have told Amnesty International that dozens of the protesters were beaten with batons and other weapons despite acting peacefully and pleading with the security forces that they were unarmed and would not harm anyone. Similarly, journalists present during the events claimed that they were beaten despite wearing vests clearly marked "press" and signalling their status orally to the security forces. Amnesty International strongly recommends that these allegations of excessive use of force be fully investigated.

Additional testimony received from eyewitnesses alleged that some members of units not apparently trained in crowd control, such as the traffic police, removed their belts and used these to beat protesters and journalists, while others employed equipment described as "skewers" from nearby restaurants for the same purpose. Amnesty International urges that such cases of security forces apparently engaging in inappropriate conduct or, at the very least, undertaking crowd-control duties without the appropriate training should be investigated.

Amnesty International has previously written to the Jordanian authorities to ask for details of investigations being conducted into claims of torture and other ill-treatment against a number of persons detained following violent clashes during a demonstration in Zarqa on 15 April 2011 and into reports of excessive use of force against a demonstration in Amman on 24 and 25 March, when protesters advocating reform were attacked and subsequently one person died and scores more were injured. It is yet to receive an answer to these queries.