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Colombia: Security forces must refrain from excessive use of force during rural protests

The Colombian authorities must ensure that the security forces, in particular the ESMAD anti-riot police, refrain from using disproportionate and excessive force against demonstrators, Amnesty International said today as a nationwide protest by rural communities enters its second week.

According to local social and human rights organizations, at least 179 demonstrators have been injured and three Indigenous protestors killed since Indigenous, Afro-descendant and peasant farmer communities began a national mobilization on 30 May. There are also reports that members of the security forces have been injured.

The demonstrators are protesting at what they argue is the Colombian government's failure to comply with numerous agreements on a range of rural issues. These include agrarian reform; education; health; free, prior and informed consent; and mining.

The security forces have a duty to guarantee public order but this must not be used as an excuse to ignore international standards on the use of force by the security forces.

There must be full and impartial investigations by the civilian justice system into the deaths and injuries to establish if these were the result of an excessive use of force by the security forces. The results of these investigations must be made public and those responsible brought to justice before ordinary courts.

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