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Dominican Republic: Strikers' deaths must be investigated

Amnesty International is calling on the authorities to immediately conduct a full and impartial enquiry into the deaths of at least six people during the 24-hour general strike in the Dominican Republic yesterday and the day before.

"The authorities must demonstrate their commitment to international standards governing the use of force by law enforcement officials by promptly bringing those involved in the reported violations to justice before ordinary courts."

"These most recent deaths come in the wake of months of civil disturbances in the Dominican Republic, in which scores of demonstrators and bystanders, as well as some police, have been killed or injured," Amnesty International said.

The general strike, a culmination of months of protests at skyrocketing prices and severe energy cuts, was called by a coalition of grassroots women, student, community and trade union organisations. Strikers' demands included an end to foreign debt repayment and to agreements between the government and the International Monetary Fund.

In the run-up to the strike, Dominican police reportedly arrested several hundred activists in an attempt to prevent them from organising. In addition, police and military were deployed in the streets throughout the country in an effort to dissuade potential participants.

Nonetheless, businesses, schools and public buildings closed for the general strike, and demonstrators in Santo Domingo, Santiago, Bonao, San Francisco de Macoris, Moca and numerous other towns throughout the country reportedly clashed with police. Official sources report that six people, including one police officer, were killed and over 30 wounded, while press accounts point to a death toll of at least nine, with over 50 wounded.

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