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Istanbul May Day celebrations: Denial of right to peaceful protest and excessive use of force by police

May Day celebrations in Istanbul, Turkey were again marred by police violence and attempts by the authorities to prevent demonstrations from going ahead.

The Istanbul Governor's office cancelled public transport during the day in an effort to prevent demonstrators arriving at pre-arranged meeting sites. Demonstrators were also banned from marching on Taksim Square in central Istanbul, the traditional venue for May Day demonstrations, due to major ongoing construction work.

Amnesty International is concerned that once again police used excessive force against demonstrators, including the widespread and excessive use of water cannon and tear gas against peaceful protestors.

In some instances protestors threw stones following attempts by police to disperse the protestors using force. Amnesty International received multiple allegations of demonstrators being beaten by police officers.

Confrontations between the police and demonstrators took place across different areas of the city, especially in the central neighbourhoods of Beşiktaş and Şişli which border the Taksim district.

It was unclear what legitimate purpose could have been pursued by police in their use of water cannon against peaceful demonstrators and those leaving the site of demonstrations. Amnesty International is also concerned at reports that tear gas was fired into buildings, including private homes and vehicles threatening the safety of demonstrators and other members of the public.

Scores of injuries were reported, including two separate incidents where demonstrators had been hit in the head by tear gas canisters fired by police. One, a 17-year old girl reportedly was in a coma for 24 hours as a result of the injuries sustained. Another demonstrator is reported to have lost the use of one eye, following being hit in the head with a tear gas canister.

Amnesty International is dismayed at statements by the authorities indicating that force was used only against "marginal groups" and that police had used appropriate force in the context of the demonstrations.

Amnesty International recalls the obligation of the police and the authorities more generally not to discriminate on grounds of political opinion or any ground in the context of their duties and calls on the authorities to ensure the application of the standards found in the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

The events witnessed on the streets of Istanbul during May Day celebrations clearly illustrate the need for the Turkish authorities to show the political will to end the routine use of

excessive force at demonstrations. Amnesty International also calls on the authorities to provide law enforcement officials with guidelines requiring that any use of force be proportional to the threat encountered and in line with relevant international human rights standards.

Amnesty International also calls on the authorities to conduct a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into allegations of excessive use of force by police officers.

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