

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI index: EUR 70/021/2012
24 October 2012

Amnesty International condemns excessive use of force by Kosovo Police

Amnesty International is concerned at the excessive use of force employed by the Kosovo Police against a demonstration in the capital Pristina on Monday. The organization calls on the authorities to carry out prompt, thorough, effective and impartial investigations into any such allegations made against Kosovo Police officers. If sufficient evidence exists that any particular Kosovo Police officers used excessive force which amounted to torture or other ill-treatment, those responsible should be subject to disciplinary, and when appropriate criminal, proceedings.

The unauthorised demonstration outside the parliament was organized by Vetëvendosje (Self Determination) party, objecting to talks taking place in the parliament on Monday between Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi and Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dačić.

Police had established a cordon to prevent demonstrators from approaching the parliament; in return some demonstrators threw white paint and tomatoes at the police lines. The police began to use tear-gas to disperse the crowd, who moved from the parliament and continued the protest in the form of a rally. The police continued to try to disperse the rally, using tear-gas and pepper spray, making arrests until around 18.00.

From eye witness statements and media reports, Amnesty International has observed the use of excessive force against on demonstrators. In some instances, persons were forced to the ground and beaten with batons or kicked; in others, an elderly man was hit on the head with a truncheon and demonstrators, who made no attempt to resist arrest, were pushed over or thrown between police officers. People sitting passively on the ground in front of police lines were beaten with batons. Other individuals appear to have been ill-treated even after they had been brought under control and handcuffed.

More than 63 people were arrested. According to one of those arrested, they included passers-by and other members of the public, some of them elderly, who were arrested after they had asked the police what they were doing.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned about the condition of a German citizen who was a bystander to the demonstration, and remains in a coma at Pristina hospital. The exact circumstances under which she collapsed cannot yet be determined.

Amnesty International many of those arrested, who were released on Tuesday evening, allege that they were ill-treated in detention. Misim Sadriu, 41 years old, stated that he was taken to an office inside the police station and allegedly beaten about the head by a special police officer; he suffered bleeding in one ear. Other police officers then allegedly entered the room, and beat him again. He was told that he was being beaten because he had been filmed swearing at the police during the demonstration.

Amnesty International has previously expressed concerns about the excessive use of force by the Kosovo Police against members of Vetëvendosje, including most recently in January of this year. In 2011, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) issued a report on their visit to Kosovo in June 2010 which highlighted their concerns about the ill-treatment on arrest of members of Vetëvendosje, interviewed by the CPT while they were detained at Pristina police station.

At that time, the CPT recommended that, “the relevant authorities redouble their efforts to combat ill-treatment by the police. All KP officers (including officers of the criminal police) should be reminded once again that all forms of ill-treatment of detained persons are unacceptable and will be the subject of severe sanctions. They should also be reminded that no more force than is strictly necessary should be used when effecting an apprehension and that, once apprehended persons have been brought under control, there can be no justification for hitting them”.

International standards on policing call for the use of force to be proportionate, and consistent with national law and international human rights law and standards, including the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, which states, “In the dispersal of assemblies that are unlawful but non-violent, law enforcement officials shall avoid the use of force or, where that is not practicable, shall restrict such force to the minimum extent necessary”.

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