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China must avoid using excessive force in response to protests and allow independent monitors into areas of protest, Amnesty International said today after Chinese security forces in Sichuan Province reportedly fired on Tibetan protesters for a second successive day.

Chinese authorities have dismissed reports based on eyewitness accounts of deadly clashes between police and Tibetan protesters as "hype".

"The Chinese authorities are responding only with repression and a security crackdown to an already volatile situation, instead of addressing long-standing human rights grievances on the part of Tibetans," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific director.

"The situation has not improved in Tibetan areas since 2008 when tensions exploded into violence. Grievances regarding restrictions on religious and cultural freedoms have gotten worse, not better."

According to the official Xinhua news agency, Chinese security forces fired on protesters in Drango County (in Chinese, Luhuo) on Monday, killing at least one.

Five police officers and several protesters were reportedly injured. The protesters are also said to have smashed shops in the area.

Independent Tibetan sources told Amnesty International that at least 36 protesters were injured, several of whom are in critical condition. New reports of protests in other parts of Sichuan Province and shootings by the police emerged today.

According to unconfirmed reports, the security forces today opened fire on Tibetan protesters in Sherthar (Seda in Chinese) county in Sichuan province, killing two and injuring others.

This is a third reported incident of police shooting at Tibetan protesters in less than two weeks, although Amnesty International is unable to independently confirm the reports.

No foreign media or observers have been allowed into the area, making events difficult to confirm. The authorities have stated that they will investigate the Monday incident.

"The Chinese government must ensure that the investigation is independent, impartial and effective. They should also promptly investigate the other reports of excessive use of force," said Sam Zarifi.

Amnesty International repeated its request that the Chinese government allow independent monitors, for instance the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, into the country.

"The Chinese government has displayed increasingly repressive behaviour in ethnic minority areas such as Tibet. That's why we are worried about further violence and bloodshed," said Sam Zarifi.

"Chinese security forces should exercise restraint and only use firearms when absolutely necessary and as a last resort. Lethal force may only be intentionally used strictly to protect life."

Since March last year, 16 ethnic Tibetans have set themselves on fire in protest at religious and cultural repression under Chinese rule.

In a joint letter to the Chinese government in November, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch called for the authorities to address the underlying causes of the protests.