Yemeni authorities unleash deadly force on protesters

Yemeni security forces have acted in contravention of international human rights standards by opening fire on peaceful pro-secession protesters today in the south, resulting in four deaths and dozens of injured, said Amnesty International today.

Security forces used firearms and tear gas killing two and injuring at least 25, as thousands of supporters of the Southern Movement, which demands peaceful secession from the rest of Yemen, gathered in a non-violent sit-in at Al-'Aroudh Square in Khormaksar, Aden.

"In utter disregard for international standards, the Yemeni authorities have attempted to quash peaceful protests with shocking use of lethal force. This is yet another bloody stain on the government's bleak human rights record", said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa

In addition to the two killed in the protest, a man from al-Dhal'i was killed and another seriously injured as security forces opened fire to prevent them from entering Aden to join the demonstration.

On Wednesday, one man was killed in al-'Areesh area in Aden when security forces opened fire on a group of people travelling from Abyan to Aden to take part in today's protest.

Amnesty International has also received reports that security forces have used firearms against protesters in the Crater area in Aden.

One eyewitness told the organization that security forces were acting in support of a counter-march believed to have been organized by the Islah party, a member of the coalition government.

The eyewitness described how the security forces had violently dispersed a Southern Movement protest around al-'Aroudh Square as the counter-protesters occupied the area.

"Not a single person from the Islah march was injured, in fact they were not only protected, but security forces paved the way for them to occupy the square by opening fire on the Southern Movement protesters and dispersing them," the eyewitness said.

Several Aden residents told Amnesty International that security forces deployed armoured vehicles and armed personnel in the city on Wednesday, ahead of the planned protest. One Southern Movement activist said that it was clear security forces were intent on disrupting the demonstration.

Also on Wednesday, in anticipation of the protest, security forces arrested a number of people believed to be leaders in the Southern Movement, in what an activist said was an obvious attempt to derail the protest.

"Yemeni security forces must immediately desist from using force against peaceful protesters and respect

the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. Thorough, independent and impartial investigations must be carried out promptly into all deaths and injuries of protesters in recent days," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

"Amnesty International's warnings to the Yemeni security forces yesterday not to use unnecessary or excessive force against peaceful protesters have fallen on deaf ears."