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Bolivia must investigate violence at disability protest

Bolivia's authorities must initiate a prompt, full and independent investigation into reports that police used excessive force against people with disabilities during a demonstration in La Paz on Thursday, Amnesty International said.

Several people were injured or fainted after the police set up a cordon near the city's Plaza Murillo and repelled protesters who tried to advance, reportedly using pepper spray and electric shocks indiscriminately.

Officials said police were acting in response to violent attacks by demonstrators, and police officers were also injured in the clashes.

"Disturbing reports and images from near Plaza Murillo seem to show the police lashing out indiscriminately against the protesters, many of whom were using wheelchairs," said Guadalupe Marengo, Deputy Americas Programme Director at Amnesty International.

"Bolivian security forces have a duty to maintain public order, but they should always do so in compliance with international human rights standards on the use of force. Any allegations of abuse should be thoroughly and impartially investigated."

The clashes in La Paz ended a 100-day journey for many of the protesters, who had covered some 1,000 miles across the country to demand an increase in state subsidies for people with disabilities.

On Thursday, the Bolivian Chamber of Deputies passed a law for the preferential treatment of people with disabilities (*Ley general y trato preferente para personas con discapacidad*).

The protesters claim that the government failed to take into account their demands when drafting the law. In particular, they are calling for a better work opportunities and an increase in the state disability allowance.

"The authorities should ensure that Bolivia's people with disabilities are consulted on any proposed law affecting them. Any measure must fulfil their needs as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities," said Guadalupe Marengo.