

AI Index: PRE 01/146/2011
18 March 2011

Morocco urged not to suppress weekend protests

Thousands are expected to take to the streets across the country on Sunday to demand political and human rights reform but there are fears the authorities may resort to heavy-handed tactics to quell the protests.

Last Sunday, scores were injured and at least 120 were briefly detained when security forces used unjustified force to break up a protest in central Casablanca.

“The unnecessary acts of violence witnessed last weekend are a disturbing regression and make a mockery of the Moroccan King’s promise a few days earlier to undertake fundamental reform and uphold human rights,” said Philip Luther, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“Moroccans must be allowed to peacefully protest without fear, rather than face attacks by security forces just for demanding their rights.”

Security forces kicked protesters and beat them with sticks as they dispersed a peaceful sit-in involving hundreds of people in Casablanca’s Mohamed V Square on 13 March, and prevented other protesters from reaching it.

The violence came a few days after King Mohamed VI announced in a televised speech that the authorities were willing to undertake reforms and protect freedoms.

A middle-aged married couple told Amnesty International security forces violently blocked them from reaching the square.

The husband said he was thrown to the ground, beaten with sticks and kicked by four security officers. His left shoulder was broken, while his wife said that she was also beaten by police officers after trying to help him.

“We wanted to protest peacefully; to offer a better future to our children and other children in Morocco, to call for social and economic reforms and to end corruption. We don’t understand the reaction of the authorities,” the husband told Amnesty International.

The protesters included members of various groups from across the political spectrum including the 20 February Movement, which was set up last month to call for political and human rights reform, as well as human rights defenders.

Among those seriously injured were Mohamed Sahiri, who was reportedly hit on the head and back, and Sai’d Chami, who sustained fractures to his backbone and left leg.

Amnesty International has also received information that some protesters treated in government-run

hospitals were denied copies of medical reports detailing their injuries and the likely cause of them, potentially obstructing them from obtaining justice and reparation.

The security forces involved in the violent break-up of the demonstration were reported to belong to various law enforcement agencies in charge of maintaining public order, including the Moroccan Auxiliary Forces (Forces Auxiliaires Marocaines, FAM) and the Mobile Intervention Unit (Corps mobile d'intervention, CMI).

These units have previously been used by the Moroccan authorities to break up peaceful demonstrations.

“The Moroccan authorities must uphold the right of protestors to express their views and demands in a peaceful manner and to instruct security forces not to resort to unjustified or unnecessary force to disperse demonstrations in line with Morocco’s international human rights obligations and the King’s promises,” said Philip Luther.