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Honduras urged to tackle prison turmoil after riots leave 13 dead

Honduran authorities must urgently tackle chronic problems in their prisons, Amnesty International said after at least 13 inmates were killed in the latest tragedy to hit the country's troubled jails.

The prisoners died during unrest in San Pedro Sula prison after fighting broke out and a fire started inside the overcrowded jail on Thursday. The San Pedro Sula prison reportedly holds more than 2,000 prisoners in a jail designed for 800.

"Inmates in Honduras's prisons are being denied their basic human rights and this latest horrific incident shows how precarious their situation continues to be – despite the repeated government promises that no more such incidents will occur," said Esther Major, Amnesty International's Central American Researcher.

"Many of those currently languishing in Honduras's overcrowded jails have been there for years awaiting trial and have not even been convicted of any crime.

One inmate was reportedly stabbed and decapitated during the rioting. The cause of death of the remaining 13 dead prisoners has yet to be confirmed.

The incident comes just weeks after at least 360 prisoners died in a fire in Comayagua prison on 14 February.

Following the fire, the Honduran government pledged that such an incident would never happen again.

"It seems that no lessons have been learned from the tragic events of just two months ago in Comayagua," said Esther Major.

"Unless real changes are made to alleviate the horrendous conditions in which prisoners are held, the promises made by President Lobo's government about improving prison conditions will be seen as hollow."

Amnesty International has called on the Honduran authorities to investigate yesterday's events at San Pedro Sula prison, and those at Comayagua last month.

"The survivors and the victims' families need to know the truth about how these tragedies were allowed to happen," said Esther Major.