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Georgia must investigate ‘excessive use of force’ against protesters

Georgian authorities must investigate allegations of excessive use of force by police against anti-government protests in which two people died, Amnesty International said today.

Protests in the capital Tbilisi calling for the resignation of President Mikheil Saakashvili were violently dispersed by riot police officers overnight, scattering about a thousand demonstrators.

A policeman and a civilian were killed after being hit by a speeding car, allegedly carrying an opposition leader away from the scene.

A spokesperson from the Georgian Ministry of Interior said nearly 40 people were injured as riot police dispersed the protests after its authorisation expired at midnight to make way for Independence Day events,

“While some of the protesters were armed with makeshift shields and flagpoles and clearly intent on resisting attempts to disperse them, the police have no excuse for beating those offering no resistance,” said John Dalhuisen, Amnesty International’s Director for Europe and Central Asia.

“There must be a thorough investigation into these incidents, which must also examine the instructions issued to individual officers on the ground,” he added.

A number of journalists were also beaten and injured in the clashes, according to reports from media and local rights groups.

Riot police officers reportedly swept into the crowd, firing tear gas, rubber bullets and water canons.

Video footage shows officers chasing the protestors and kicking and beating them with truncheons. Several protesters were also reported to have been chased and beaten as they lay on the ground.

Approximately 90 people have been jailed for up to two months for resisting arrest.