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Tear gas fired as Greek police clash with Athens protesters

Greek riot police must not use excessive force in their handling of violence during protests in Athens, Amnesty International said today amid reports protesters were hospitalized as police fired massive amounts of tear gas.

The clashes came amid two days of protest in Syntagma square against an unpopular austerity bill, approved by the Greek Parliament today.

“The largely peaceful demonstrations of the past two days have been marred again by a minority of rioters clashing with the police,” said John Dalhuisen, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for Europe and Central Asia.

“Police have a duty to stop the violence and arrest those responsible, but they must ensure the use of force is proportionate and directed only at violent demonstrators. They must not curtail the legitimate right of the vast majority of peaceful demonstrators to gather and protest in Syntagma square.”

Trade Unions yesterday declared a 48-hour general strike in Greece to oppose government plans to introduce new austerity measures. Syntagma square in Athens, opposite the Parliament, has been the rallying point for thousands of demonstrators during the strike.

The Greek movement of “the indignant” (indignados) have also peacefully occupied the square for several weeks.

Video footage and witness testimony points to the repeated use of excessive force by police in recent demonstrations, including the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of tear gas and other chemicals against largely peaceful protesters.

Amnesty International representatives present in Syntagma square have witnessed incidents of peaceful protesters being beaten by police officers.

Clouds of tear gas around the square today forced a large number of demonstrators to retreat inside Syntagma square’s metro station and nearby streets, where they continued their protest.

Many protesters have reportedly been hospitalized with breathing problems caused by inhaling the tear gas and a number of protesters and riot police officers have been injured.