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Ukraine: Police crisis escalates after clash with Kyiv protestors

The latest violent reaction to allegations of abuse by Ukraine's police force underlines the urgent need for the government to address public concern that the force has become little more than a criminal enterprise, Amnesty International said today.

Hundreds of residents tried to storm Svatoshyno police station in Kyiv on Friday night. The events were triggered by reports that a police officer had punched a young woman in the stomach when she asked him to speak to her in Ukrainian rather than Russian. She was hospitalised with a suspected broken rib after the assault.

Demonstrators broke through the police station's perimeter fence before being pushed back.

The crowd chanted 'Vradyivka' in reference to protests two weeks ago when residents laid siege to Vradyivka police station in southern Ukraine. Those angry scenes were sparked by the gang-rape of a 29 year old woman who was beaten and left for dead by three men, two of whom she has identified as local police officers.

"This latest attack shows that the public has little confidence the government is getting to grips with police abuse. Vradyivka is the straw that broke the camel's back," said Max Tucker, Amnesty International's Ukraine campaigner, in Kyiv.

"Ukrainians are no longer prepared to tolerate years of widespread abuse at the hands of a corrupt police force. Unless the government immediately establishes an independent system for investigating allegations of police criminality, we will increasingly see people taking justice into their own hands." The reports of rape by police officers in Vradyivka have rocked the country, leading to President Yanukovich assuming personal responsibility for overseeing the investigation and a series of dismissals of high-ranking police officers.

Amnesty International has been calling on Ukraine to establish an effective system to investigate police abuses since 2011, and has continued to document numerous cases of torture, extortion and abuse by officers. These crimes usually go unpunished as the local prosecutors tasked with investigating routinely refuse to bring charges against their colleagues in the police.