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Russian authorities must stop mistreatment of peaceful protester

The Russian authorities must halt police mistreatment of election protesters, journalists and detainees, ahead of further planned opposition demonstrations, Amnesty International said today.

More than 1,000 people, including journalists, were reportedly detained following demonstrations against the manipulation of votes at Sunday's parliamentary elections. Figures vary, but possibly more than 100 remain in detention, though many have been released pending court hearings.

Amnesty International has received numerous reports of mistreatment of detainees, beatings of peaceful protesters by the police, denial of medical treatment, and closed court hearings.

As more demonstrations are planned, the organisation is calling on the Russian authorities to rein in the police and respect the right to peaceful protest.

"The scale of arrests has not been in any way justified," said John Dalhuisen, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Europe and Central Asia. We fear that the Russian police are simply quashing opposition protest, no matter how peaceful."

"Peaceful spontaneous protests in response to significant political developments are clearly covered by international human rights law. The protests we have seen across Russia in the last few days fall under this protection."

"Opposition protesters have been detained simply for shouting 'Freedom' or 'We need another Russia' and now many detainees are being denied basic standards of treatment for anyone held in detention," said John Dalhuisen.

"These detainees are prisoners of conscience and must be released immediately."

Several cases of assaults by police on clearly identified journalists include that of Aleksandr Chernikh of the daily Kommersant, who has described being thrown to the ground by police in Moscow, jumped upon and kicked repeatedly on 4 December, after showing his press pass.

St Petersburg opposition member Olga Kurnosova was taken to hospital after being detained by police on 4 December.

"We would also question why opposition protesters are being arrested in large numbers while pro-government supporters assembled in the same locations have been untouched," said John Dalhuisen.

Friends and relatives of some detainees have contacted Amnesty International in large numbers to report numerous violations, including that their loved ones are being denied food by the police, and that food being brought by relatives is not being passed on.

According to some sources, about 100 people have already been sentenced, some to administrative detention. Others have been fined.

The authorities have imposed restrictions such as closing hearings to the public in at least one Moscow court. Amnesty International sought an explanation for this suspension of fair trial standards, and was told by the court's representative that "I think this is a measure to guarantee the normal functioning of the court."