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Restraint urged in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq following protester deaths

Amnesty International has called on the Kurdistan regional government to rein in armed political party militias who killed two protestors yesterday as anti-government demonstrations continue in the north of Iraq.

Hundreds of Goran party activists were today surrounding the headquarters of the opposition party in Sulaimaniya city to protect it from government security forces and armed militia belonging to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

Yesterday, armed KDP militia killed two people in Sulaimaniya, including a 15-year-old boy, who were protesting outside the main offices of the KDP and calling for an end to corruption. The KDP and another Kurdish party jointly hold power as the government of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

Yesterday's killings added fuel to an already volatile situation in Sulaimaniya, and represent a very worrying, as well as tragic, development. It is imperative that the authorities step in and prevent further killings and other abuses, and bring the KDP militia under control and accountable under the law.

The Kurdish authorities must order an immediate, independent investigation into yesterday's killings and those who perpetrated them must be brought to justice if, as it appears, they were unlawful killings.

Violence flared in Sulaimaniya yesterday after around 400 people, who had earlier participated in a larger demonstration in the city centre, began throwing stones at the offices of the ruling KDP.

KDP militia responded by opening fire on the protesters, killing one person and injuring about 56, many critically.

Later that evening offices belonging to the opposition Goran movement were burnt down.

Since then, more armed KDP militia are said to have been called to Sulaimaniya and stationed just outside the city.

The two political parties that jointly rule Iraq's three Kurdish provinces continue to operate armed militia who act almost as a law unto themselves and have been permitted to commit human rights abuses with impunity. It is high time that they were made answerable under the law.