

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

AI index: PRE 01/187/2011

Embargoed until 0001hrs AST 6 April 2011 (2101hrs GMT 5 April 2011)

International community must help probe Yemen's protest killings

The international community must play a more active role if Yemenis are to get accountability for the bloody killings of recent weeks, Amnesty International said as it released a new report into human rights violations in Yemen over the last year.

- *Moment of Truth for Yemen* documents the brutal repression of a wave of protests against the rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh which has left 94 dead according to the organization's latest figures. The protests have been fuelled by frustration at corruption, unemployment and repression of freedoms.

"The Yemeni government has an abysmal record of failing to investigate or prosecute those responsible for unlawful killings and torture or other ill-treatment," said Philip Luther, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Middle East and North Africa."

"The international community has provided development and security assistance to the Yemeni authorities when asked. It is now time for it to step in and help deliver justice for the families of those who have lost their lives during this turbulent period."

The worst violence took place on 18 March, since labelled "Bloody Friday" by protesters, when an apparently co-ordinated sniper attack on a protest camp in Sana'a reportedly left 52 people dead and hundreds injured.

An eyewitness told Amnesty International that most of those killed were shot in the head, chest or neck, many of them dying at the scene.

The Yemeni government announced on 19 March that an investigation would be opened, but no further details have been made public.

Amnesty International is not aware of any member of the security forces being investigated for deaths which have occurred in anti-government protests since mid-February 2011.

The organization called on the Yemeni authorities to acknowledge that they need the help of the international community to carry out investigations that can uncover the full truth about the recent protest deaths in the country.

"Yemenis need an independent commission of inquiry to investigate the killings and injury of demonstrators or bystanders in recent weeks," said Philip Luther

"The inquiry needs real teeth, with powers to compel officials to testify and to ensure that anyone identified as having committed or ordered unlawful killings or excessive use of force is brought to justice."

Large demonstrations have continued to take place across Yemen and in some cases violently repressed. Between 2 and 4 April, thousands took to the streets in Ta'izz where security forces reportedly used excessive force injuring hundreds and as yet unknown number of deaths. .

Amnesty International warned against any possible political deals that would see President Saleh, his close relatives and possibly others offered immunity against prosecution in return for handing over power.

“The strongmen at the top cannot be allowed to just shift quietly into the sidelines when the Yemeni people are so vocally calling for accountability,” said Philip Luther.

“The way to begin defusing tensions across the country is to deliver truth and justice, not to find ways to sidestep it.”

The report also details Amnesty International’s grave concerns at continuing human rights violations, including unlawful killings, torture and prolonged detention without charge, related to the Yemeni government’s response to growing calls for secession in the south, attacks by al-Qa’ida and an intermittent conflict with Huthi rebels in the north.

A commission of inquiry into protest deaths since February should be the springboard for a much wider process of dealing with the heavy legacy of impunity for patterns of violations in recent years, the organization said.

Amnesty International also called on all governments to immediately suspend the authorization, supply and transfers of weapons, munitions, armaments and related material to the security forces in Yemen, if they could be used for excessive force in the policing of protests.

Suppliers to Yemen include Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, the Russian Federation, Turkey, UK, Ukraine and the USA .

Notes for editors

- Moment of Truth for Yemen is embargoed to 0001hrs AST 6 April 2011 (2101hrs GMT 5 April 2011) - for an embargoed copy of the report please contact the Amnesty International press office on +44 20 7413 5566.
- The reported death toll count of 94 is as of 1 April 2011, this number may change as a result of new incidents. Please contact us for updates to figures on the day.
- Philip Luther, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa, and Dina El-Mamoun, Yemen researcher, are available for interview. Contact the Press Office on +44 20 7413 5566 to arrange.
- The Amnesty International Press Office can supply contact details of people in Yemen who can be interviewed on repression of protests.