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Switzerland : Policing operations surrounding the World Economic Forum must respect international human rights standards

Amnesty International is calling on the Swiss federal and cantonal authorities to ensure that international human rights standards are fully observed during policing operations in the run-up to the World Economic Forum (WEF), being held in Davos between 21 and 25 January, and associated demonstrations taking place in Switzerland.

Policing operations surrounding a number of recent demonstrations in Switzerland have resulted in alleged violations of international standards on the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials. These standards stipulate that force should be used only as a last resort, in proportion to the threat posed and that its use should be designed to minimize damage and injury.

"Clearly the Swiss authorities have a responsibility to ensure the safety and security of WEF participants, as well as that of demonstrators, local inhabitants and property. However, it is also their duty to ensure that people are able to exercise peacefully their rights of freedom of assembly and expression," said Amnesty International.

"The right not to be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention and the fundamental rights of people deprived of their liberty must also be fully respected."

Amnesty International has been concerned by allegations of police officers using unwarranted and excessive use of force in the context of several demonstrations and making abusive use of police equipment designed to temporarily disable or incapacitate. Therefore, Amnesty International is calling for weapons firing projectiles such as rubber bullets and ‘markers’ (that is, plastic capsules containing paint and metal), dart-firing taser guns, and disabling chemical irritant gases not to be used in any canton, without rigorous independent investigations into their potential for abuse and medical effects, and without strict rules, in line with international standards, regulating their use.

Amnesty International is also urging that all officers engaged in direct interventions with the public during policing operations surrounding demonstrations prominently display some form of individual identification --such as a service number, in line with the European Code of Police Ethics.

"The organization recognizes the difficulties faced in policing major international meetings, especially if certain factions are set on causing violence. Amnesty International does not oppose the lawful use of reasonable force by police officers. However, the authorities must ensure that police officers act in accordance with international standards, including those on arrest and detention, as well as on the use of

force," the human rights organization concluded.

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