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Turkey: More deaths as a result of police force

Amnesty International calls for an immediate, impartial and effective investigation into the deaths of two people following clashes between youths and police in the Okmeydanı district of Istanbul on 22 May.

Uğur Kurt was attending a funeral at the Cemevi (Alevi place of worship) in Okmeydanı at around 11.30 in the morning when he was shot in the head. CCTV footage shows Uğur Kurt and others standing in the courtyard of the Cemevi at the time that he was shot. He was taken to hospital but died as a result of his injuries.

Clashes between youths and police were taking place close to the Cemevi at the time of the shooting. Reports indicate that police opened fire with live ammunition after youths threw a Molotov cocktail at the "scorpion" armoured car that they were travelling in. A statement by the Istanbul Governor confirmed that police used weapons with live ammunition.

International human rights standards require that firearms are used only as a last resort if all other means are found to be ineffective to counter an immediate threat to life.

Paragraph 9 of the UN Basic Principles on the use of force states "Law enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury, to prevent the perpetration of a particularly serious crime involving grave threat to life, to arrest a person presenting such a danger and resisting their authority, or to prevent his or her escape, and only when less extreme means are insufficient to achieve these objectives. In any event, intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life." Amnesty International is concerned at reports that a crime scene investigation has not been undertaken, 24 hours after the first incident took place.

Clashes between youths and police continued in Okmeydanı throughout the day. Nine people were reported injured at the scene of the clashes. According to initial reports a person was hit by a tear gas canister in his right eye. He was taken to hospital but today died of his injuries.

Amnesty International calls on the authorities to ensure that prompt, effective, and impartial investigations are undertaken into the full circumstances of both deaths and to ensure that any subsequent use of force adheres strictly to the principles of necessity and proportionality set out in international human rights standards.

The two deaths in Okmeydanı come following a period in Turkey in which police have continually used excessive force at the scene of demonstrations. Four people had died at the scene of demonstrations as a direct result of abusive force by police since the beginning of June 2013. The failure of the authorities to conduct prompt and effective investigations into police abuses has contributed to rising anger.

The four who died at the scene of demonstrations include Berkin Elvan, a 15 year-old who died on 11 March 2014 following injuries he sustained at a protest in June 2013. All the evidence suggests that he was hit in the head by a tear gas canister fired by police from close range. A criminal investigation into the killing of Berkin Elvan remains stalled.

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