

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: EUR 39/001/2012  
26 January 2012

### **Romania: Alleged excessive use of force during Bucharest demonstrations**

Today, Amnesty International wrote to the Romanian Minister of Interior, Constantin Traian Igas, the General Inspector of the Romanian Gendarmerie, Col. Angelica Costel Gavrilă, and the General Prosecutor, Laura Codruta Kovesi, to express concern about allegations of excessive use of force by police officers (*jandarmi*) when trying to disperse demonstrators. Amnesty International urges the Romanian authorities to conduct a prompt, independent, thorough and effective investigation into all such allegations, and to bring anyone responsible for human rights violations to justice.

According to media reports, demonstrations have been taking place in Bucharest since 13 January calling for change in the political, economical and social situation. Although generally peaceful, serious incidents of violence were reported on 15 and 19 January between protesters and the police. In one such incident on 15 January, some of the demonstrators threw stones and pieces of broken asphalt at the police, raised barricades and set them on fire. In response, the police intervened with batons, water cannons and tear gas.

Media reports and video footage widely available on internet however show several episodes of police apparently using excessive force against seemingly peaceful demonstrators who were not offering any resistance. A video footage shows police hitting one woman with a baton, while two other police hit various times with a baton a man standing on the side of a shop. Nor the man or the woman were offering resistance or were displaying any violent conduct.

According to a second video footage, police continued hitting a man after he was lying on the ground and was not offering any resistance. The video also shows two police officers hitting a demonstrator while on the ground and spraying what seems to be chemicals towards his face.

Further reports and statements of testimonies accounted in the Romanian media tell the story of a man who was kicked by police repeatedly until his leg was fractured. The officers allegedly dragged the man and kicked him various times until other protesters intervened and the man was left lying on the ground.

In the evening of 19 January 2012, new violent episodes between police and demonstrators were reported in the University Square, where tear gas was allegedly used to disperse the protesters. Reportedly, dozens of people were arrested and five demonstrators required medical assistance. Several protesters reported that they have been physically and verbally abused by police when the demonstrations were being dispersed.

Although under international human rights law everyone has a right to participate in lawful and peaceful assemblies, restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right in the interests of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. Amnesty International does not challenge the right of relevant Romanian authorities to act in accordance with the law to impose such restrictions, and recognizes that police have an obligation to ensure safety and security. However, the policing of demonstrations should be carried out in a manner that complies with international law and standards, including the duty to exercise restraint, to act in proportion to

the seriousness of the offence and the legitimate objective to be achieved, to minimize damage and injury, and to respect and preserve human life.

According to a statement issued on 20 January by the Prosecutor's Office of the High Court of Justice and Cassation, four criminal complaints have been registered so far against police officers involved in ensuring public order during the demonstrations.

Amnesty International calls on the General Prosecutor to ensure that prompt, independent, thorough and effective investigations are carried out into the complaints registered as well as into all other cases of allegations of excessive use of force by police.

Amnesty International also calls on the Romanian authorities to ensure that, in the context of the continuing protests in Bucharest, the policing of demonstrations complies at all times with their international human rights law obligations and with international standards on policing, including the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

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