

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

31 October 31, 2013
AI Index: EUR 44/028/2013

Turkey: End excessive police force against student protestors in Ankara

Amnesty International calls on the authorities to allow peaceful demonstrations in Ankara to continue unimpeded following the repeated use of excessive force by police against students protesting against the construction of a road on their university campus.

On 18, 21 and 26 October 2013, police used excessive force against students, academics and local residents protesting what they say is the clearing of around 3,000 trees as part of the construction of a highway. Riot police have used tear gas, flash bangs and plastic bullets against peaceful demonstrators.

On the night of Friday 18 October, 20 to 25 lorries and diggers started work for the construction of a highway through a forest, part of which is on Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) campus grounds. A university academic present at the scene told Amnesty International that at around 10.30pm police used tear gas, firing a large number of canisters, first towards the ground, then directly at the 20 peaceful demonstrators as they were attempting to enter the campus. She told Amnesty International that she was hit on the heel by a gas canister and another person was hit on his hand by a plastic bullet.

According to eye witnesses, on Monday 21 October, a crowd of several hundred students and academics gathered in the afternoon for a planned 'tree planting protest' at one of the gates of the campus to symbolically replace some of the trees that had been uprooted by construction workers on the previous Friday. At around 9pm, there were still around 300 protestors at the gate. According to eye witnesses that Amnesty International has spoken to, clashes ensued when a group of unknown individuals in civilian clothes attacked some of the protestors prompting a small number of protestors to throw stones at police. Eye witnesses state that police then used disproportionate force including tear gas and flash bags to clear all of the demonstrators at the scene, injuring several people.

Police again used excessive force at around 7pm on Saturday 26 October to clear a group of up to 500 students attempting to march between two gates of the campus who were peacefully protesting the police use of force during protests in the previous week. Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International, the police issued a warning to protestors who were chanting slogans to disperse, but began using tear gas and water cannon against them without giving them any time to act on this instruction. For several hours protestors repeatedly regrouped only to be violently dispersed again. At around 10pm, police allegedly beat one of the student protestors then threw him onto a burning barricade. The student sustained serious injuries with a gash on his head and second and third degree burns on parts of his body.

The denial of the right of ODTÜ students and academics to hold peaceful protests and the excessive use of force against them by police suggests that few lessons have been learnt in aftermath of the Gezi Park protests. .

Amnesty International calls on the Turkish authorities to ensure that ODTÜ protestors' right to peaceful assembly is respected and that law enforcement officials do not use unnecessary or excessive force against protestors. Allegations of police abuses must be investigated and those responsible brought to justice.

End/