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Violent crackdown in Bahrain condemned

Amnesty International has called on the governments of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia to immediately restrain their security forces after an anti-government protester was shot dead in Bahrain today and many others sustained gunshot injuries.

Eye-witnesses told Amnesty International that Bahraini riot police and plain-clothed security forces used shotguns, rubber bullets and teargas against demonstrators in Sitra and Ma'ameer. Several ambulance drivers were attacked by riot police with batons as they tried to reach the wounded.

An eyewitness told Amnesty International that riot police blocked access to the Sitra Health Centre where many of the injured were taken, while leaving other injured people lying unassisted in the streets. The electricity supply to the centre was cut.

“The Bahraini authorities must immediately rein in their security forces and end their use of excessive force, and the Saudi Arabian authorities should demand this too if they are not to appear complicit,” said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Director. “All those involved must act with restraint to prevent further loss of life.”

The shootings came as the King of Bahrain declared a three-month state of emergency, as anti-government protesters continue to demand reform.

“Today’s shootings and the reports we are receiving about denial of medical care to the injured are a desperately worrying development and indicate a truly alarming escalation following the police killings of protesters in February and the influx yesterday of Saudi Arabian troops and Emirati police to buttress the Bahraini government,” said Malcolm Smart.

Amnesty International has confirmed that one man died in Sitra Health Centre after being shot, but has not yet been able to verify other reported deaths.

Hospital sources and other eye-witnesses have told Amnesty International that hundreds of people have been admitted with injuries but it is unclear whether these were caused by excessive force or in violent clashes.

According to media reports earlier in the day, a Saudi Arabian soldier was killed after clashes with protesters.

“The King’s declaration of a state of emergency must not be used as a cover for repression and abuses of human rights, as has happened in so many other countries,” said Malcolm Smart. “Those responsible for excessive force, unlawful killings and other serious abuses must be held to account and the King and his government have an obligation to ensure it.”