

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Puerto Rico: Amnesty International calls for police restraint as student strike continues**

Amnesty International calls on the Puerto Rican Police Department to exercise restraint in policing the ongoing strike by university students in San Juan, which is now entering its seventh week.

The organization recognizes the serious challenges inherent in policing large-scale demonstrations, including working in volatile circumstances, but stresses the importance of police obligations under international standards that force may only be used when strictly necessary and proportionate, and must be used in a manner designed to minimize damage or injury.

In this regard, Amnesty International is concerned by police actions during a demonstration by striking students at the Sheraton Hotel on 20 May 2010. According to video footage, some students congregated outside the hotel, while a large number managed to enter the hotel lobby with the intention of disrupting a dinner being attended by Governor Luis Fortuño. Although Amnesty International recognizes the potentially threatening situation that this engendered, officers are seen striking indiscriminately at non-violent protesters with their batons, and firing pepper spray against others.

The organization has also received a number of other allegations of police use of excessive force including an incident on 14 May 2010 in which a father of a striking student was forcibly restrained by officers after he attempted to pass food to his striking son within the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) campus. José Pérez, a 30-year-old student, was reported to have been beaten by police officers on the same day as he attempted to regain entrance to the UPR campus. On 20 May 2010, during the Sheraton demonstration, José Pérez was shown on video footage being shocked with a Taser while he was being restrained on the ground by three officers.

Amnesty International has serious concerns about the use of Tasers. Based on the potential health risk linked to the weapon and their potential for abuse, Amnesty International continues to call on governments and law enforcement authorities to either suspend their use or limit their deployment to life-threatening situations in order to avoid resort to firearms.

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