

AI Index: PRE 01/259/2009  
06 July 2009

## **China: Fair and impartial investigation must be launched in Urumqi**

Amnesty International today called on the authorities in Urumqi to immediately launch an independent and impartial investigation into reports that 140 people were killed when a protest turned violent late on Sunday.

"The Chinese authorities must fully account for all those who died and have been detained. Those who were detained solely for peacefully expressing their views and exercising their freedom of expression, association and assembly must be released immediately. A fair and thorough investigation must be launched resulting in fair trials that are in accordance with international standards without recourse to the death penalty", said Roseann Rife, Amnesty International's Deputy Director Asia-Pacific. "There has been a tragic loss of life and it is essential that an urgent independent investigation takes place to bring all those responsible for the deaths to justice", said Roseann Rife. "Violence and abuses from either the authorities or protestors is in no way justified."

Amnesty International urged the authorities to respect their obligations under domestic and international law which protect peaceful freedom of expression and assembly, prohibit arbitrary arrest and torture or ill-treatment in custody.

The organization also called on the authorities to allow free access for domestic and foreign journalists and independent observers to report on the incident. Xinhua, an official state news agency, reported that police in Urumqi, capital of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and home to over 8 million Uighurs, have arrested several hundred participants, including more than ten key figures that were accused of instigating the unrest, and are still searching for approximately 90 more.

The protests are reported to have begun with non-violent demonstrations against government inaction after a violent riot at a factory in Shaoguan, Guangdong province, resulted in two deaths. On 26 June, hundreds of Uighur workers clashed with thousands of Han Chinese workers at a factory where Uighurs had been recruited from the XUAR.

Police have reportedly detained the man, a laid-off employee from the same factory, who circulated rumours which provoked the deadly clash. The official response to the violence in Guangdong was to impose an information black-out on the incident, with websites and online discussion boards instructed to delete posts related to the clash.

Beyond responding to the immediate outbreak of violence, authorities need to address issues that have given rise to tensions. Since the 1980s, the Uighurs have been the target of systematic and extensive human rights violations. These include arbitrary detention and imprisonment, incommunicado detention, and serious restrictions on religious freedom as well as cultural and social rights. Chinese government policies, including those that limit use of the Uighur language, severe restrictions on freedom of religion, and a sustained influx

of Han Chinese migrants into the region, are destroying customs and, together with employment discrimination, fuelling discontent and ethnic tensions. The Chinese government has mounted an aggressive campaign that has led to the arrest and arbitrary detention of thousands of Uighurs on charges of “terrorism, separatism and religious extremism” for peacefully exercising their human rights.