

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT



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Kuwait must honour its commitment to respect the right to peaceful assembly

Amnesty International welcomes the Kuwait Minister of Interior's recent comments committing to respect the right to peaceful assembly, but is calling on the Kuwaiti authorities to ensure they recognize and uphold the right to peaceful assembly in accordance with Kuwait's obligations both under international law and its own constitutional provisions.

The day after peaceful demonstrators were attacked by riot police and political activists were forcibly dispersed by teargas and stun grenades (sound bombs) during mass protests in several sites in Kuwait City on 21 October, the Kuwaiti authorities invoked a 1979 ban on gatherings of more than 20 people in the Gulf state.

Several other states, including the USA, publicly called for the Kuwaiti authorities to exercise restraint and to respect the right to peaceful assembly. In Kuwait and two days later, on 24 October 2012, the authorities indicated they were overturning their decision.

Amnesty International is nevertheless concerned that increasing restrictions on freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression in Kuwait, including the rising frequency with which riot police have used unlawful force in response to peaceful demonstrations, signal a disturbing trend in the country.

In a meeting with Prime Minister Jaber al-Mubarak al-Hamad al-Sabah on Thursday 18 October, Amnesty International raised concerns about the right to peacefully assemble and the unlawful use of force being exercised in Kuwait. The organization was given assurances by the Prime Minister that the authorities would uphold the right of protesters to peacefully assemble although he stressed that while the government allows demonstrations in one place, they do not allow demonstrators to undertake marches.

Under international human rights law, which Kuwait is obliged to uphold, the right to peaceful assembly also includes the right to march peacefully. Amnesty International is urging the Kuwaiti authorities to adhere to Article 44 of its Constitution and to permit both gatherings and those that are marches.

Amnesty International has spoken to several people who were allegedly beaten and then arrested by security forces at a demonstration held on Monday 15 October at Erada Square, outside Kuwait's parliament. They told the organization they had left the demonstration and were walking back to their vehicles in order to leave when they were attacked. Other eyewitnesses said riot police at the site of the demonstration ignored senior police officers' orders to deal with demonstrators peacefully.

These allegations of unlawful use of force should be investigated promptly and impartially, and anyone found responsible for abuses should be brought to justice in accordance with international fair trial standards.

Public Document

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