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Yemen warned over use of deadly force ahead of fresh protest

The Yemeni authorities must stop security forces from using unwarranted deadly force and heavy-handed tactics at a demonstration planned for tomorrow, Amnesty International has said.

“The government cannot just shoot its way out of this crisis,” said Philip Luther, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa. “Whether in uniform or in plain clothes, security forces must be immediately stopped from using live ammunition on unarmed protesters.

“After the horrific killing of dozens of protesters last Friday, it is incredibly disturbing that Yemen’s leaders have given the security forces more powers through a new emergency law instead of reining them in.”

Protest organizers have announced that tomorrow’s demonstration, dubbed the “Friday of Departure”, will march to the presidential palace from the protest camp near Sana’a University.

The protest is expected to be large after the co-ordinated attacks on demonstrators last Friday by snipers on rooftops and security forces on the ground, the death toll for which has reportedly risen to at least 52.

At least 43 others have been killed in Yemen during weeks of demonstrations calling for an end to the 32-year rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, including when security forces used live ammunition on unarmed protesters.

Yesterday Yemen’s parliament passed an emergency law giving security forces extensive powers of detention without being bound by the Criminal Procedure Law, and imposing heavy restrictions on public assembly which could be used to ban demonstrations.

The emergency law has also given the authorities the power to suspend, seize and confiscate “all media... and means of expression”.

Yesterday the Al Jazeera television office in Sana’a was closed by authorities. The office had earlier been ransacked.

Human rights activists in Yemen have condemned the state of emergency as an attack on freedom of expression, while some Yemeni parliamentarians questioned whether the vote had taken place correctly.

“The emergency law appears to be a desperate attempt to reinforce mechanisms to stamp out dissent and shut out witnesses to human rights abuses,” said Philip Luther.

“The Yemeni government needs to uphold its people’s right to express genuine grievances and ensure justice for those killed unlawfully.”