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Indonesia must investigate mine strike protest killing

The Indonesian authorities must immediately investigate the use of deadly force by police at a mining protest, Amnesty International said today after one protester was killed and at least six injured.

Indonesian security forces opened fire on striking workers of a gold and copper mine in the eastern province of Papua run by US company Freeport-Mcmoran on Monday. Some 8,000 workers at the mine have been on strike since 15 September, after demands for a pay rise reached a deadlock.

“This latest incident shows that Indonesian police have not learned how to deal with protesters without resorting to excessive, and even lethal, force,” said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International’s Asia Pacific Director.

“The police have a duty to protect themselves and uphold the law, but it is completely unacceptable to fire live ammunition at these protesters,” he said.

“The authorities must launch an independent and impartial investigation into this tragedy, and ensure that the results are made public,” he added.

Mine worker Petrus Ayemseba was shot in the buttocks and died a few hours later. Six other workers - Leo Wandagau, Alius Komba, Melkias Rumbiak, Yunus Nguluduan, Philiton Kogoya and Ahmad Mustofa were also injured from the shooting.

Freeport has accused the strikers of trying to intimidate replacement workers whom the company was trying to move into the mine workers’ barracks.

After the police opened fire, mine workers set fire to two container trucks heading to the mining town and pelted the police with rocks, according to local sources.

Amnesty International has documented numerous cases where Indonesian police have used unnecessary or excessive force or firearms and where no one has been held accountable.

“Indonesian authorities have failed to provide justice and reparations to most victims of excessive use force by the police. They must get to the bottom of this incident quickly and signal that they will impose adequate disciplinary or criminal sanctions on the police and will protect the right of Indonesians to protest,” Sam Zarifi said.

“It is high time the Indonesian police trained and equipped their staff in non-violent methods of crowd control. They also need to ensure that they have non-lethal means of force at their disposal to disperse the protesters if necessary,” he added.