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International investigation needed into Kyrgyzstan violence

Amnesty International is calling for an impartial international investigation into the violent events of the past week in southern Kyrgyzstan that left hundreds of people dead and thousands wounded and homeless.

“Only an international investigation is likely to be considered unbiased and credible by all affected groups. It is the key to restoring sustainable peace and the rule of law in the country,” said Maisy Weicherding, Amnesty International’s expert on Central Asia.

“An impartial investigation is needed to make sure evidence of human rights violations is collected and secured without delay and to ensure accountability. The perpetrators of such crimes during the past week must be identified and brought to justice.”

Amnesty International is concerned at reports that security forces have attempted to confiscate video and photographic evidence from local journalists and residents who have documented the violence. The reports come amid increasing allegations of collusion of law enforcement officers in some of the human rights violations,

In one particular incident, armed and masked men claiming to be security forces reportedly went to the home of a human rights defender in the town of Bazar Korgan and demanded that his wife hand over his camera and evidence he had collected about human rights abuses. It was reported that when she refused, they fired at the gate to the house.

“Human rights activists and independent journalists play an important role in the documentation of human rights violations. The Kyrgyzstani authorities have a duty to protect them,” said Maisy Weicherding.

The deadly violence is said to have started with clashes between rival gangs of mostly Kyrgyz and Uzbek youths on 10 June and rapidly escalated into large-scale arson, looting and violent attacks, including killings, on mainly Uzbek-populated districts in Osh and later in the city of Jalal-Abad and surrounding towns and villages.

As a result, thousands of Uzbek families have fled their homes and are living in makeshift camps or are hiding in isolated parts of the country without humanitarian assistance.

“The Kyrgyzstani interim government must react immediately to allegations of collusion of security forces and send a clear signal that any human rights violations will be prosecuted,” said Maisy Weicherding.

“The Kyrgyzstani government reports that security forces have regained control over troubled areas. However, the rule of law in the country can be re-established only if it is accompanied with accountability,”

Maisy Weicherding said.

“For this to happen, the Kyrgyzstani authorities must seek and facilitate an international investigation into the violent attacks. They must also act to protect human rights activists and independent journalists carrying out their work, as they play a vital role in any independent and impartial investigation.”