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Haiti: National Police must be held accountable for killings of civilians

The use of lethal and indiscriminate violence by the police to disperse and repress demonstrators only serves to increase tension in an already violence-torn country, said Amnesty International today as it condemned the repression against Lavalas Party supporters by Haitian National Police (HNP) officers in Port-au-Prince on 27 April.

According to reports, police officers opened fire against Lavalas supporters demonstrating near the United Nations Mission headquarters in Bourdon, Port-au-Prince.

At least 5 people died during the demonstration and 4 others are reported to have died later on as a consequence of their wounds. Several demonstrators and bystanders were also injured.

"The repression of this peaceful demonstration is not an isolated case. The insecurity and ongoing confrontation with armed groups should not be used as a pretext to crack down on demonstrators and the right to freedom of expression and association," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International calls on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) to fully comply with its mandate of "protect[ing] civilians under imminent threat of physical violence" and to strengthen its capacity to oversee all National Police operations.

"We fear an escalation of violence as the electoral process is under way and call on all sides in the current political crisis, including the police force, to make efforts to resolve their differences peacefully," said Amnesty International.

MINUSTAH and CIVPOL officials must carry out a full, independent and public investigation into the killings and help bringing those responsible to justice.

Amnesty International also calls on the international community to firmly urge the Haitian Transitional Government to ensure the protection of human rights and freedom of peaceful assembly and expression.

"In the run-up to local and presidential elections, the flare of increased political violence is latent as the implementation of a much needed comprehensive program for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration is inexcusably delayed."

Background Information

More than a year after a transitional government was put in place in Haiti, following the ousting of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide by an armed rebellion, the human rights situation has deteriorated gravely. Since September 2004, the violence has escalated to worrying proportions and the number of victims according to recent reports exceeds 600 despite the presence of a nearly 7,000 strong UN contingent mandated to secure the country and protect the population. National Police officers have been reportedly involved in several summary and unlawful killings that still remain unresolved and whose perpetrators have not yet been held accountable.

Public Document

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