



Press releases

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Maldives security forces use violence against peaceful protesters

Maldives police and military forces responded with violence against a peaceful rally backing the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), Amnesty International documented in the Maldives today, violating international standards against the use of excessive force.

At least six protesters were injured, some seriously, when combined police and military officers attacked around 300 MDP protesters in the Lonuziyaarai Kolhu area of the city – part of a wider pattern of attacks, documented by Amnesty International, on supporters of the political party of the ousted former President Mohamed Nasheed.

The protesters were part of an ongoing nightly rally in the capital, Malé in support of Nasheed, who was forced from office on 7 February, and replaced by Vice President Dr Mohamed Waheed. “People who were peacefully exercising their right to protest were beaten on the head with batons, kicked and sprayed with pepper spray. This use of excessive force violates human rights standards,” said Amnesty International’s researcher Abbas Faiz, who is documenting the human rights situation in Maldives.

One of the injured is a 16-year-old boy. He is in the custody of the police Child Protection Unit. Amnesty International's delegate in Malé was not allowed to visit him.

The security forces' attack on demonstrators in Lonuziyarai Kolhu was apparently in retaliation for earlier clashes in the city, when the windows in a police station were smashed by stones. The police accuse MDP protesters of this attack, while the MDP denies the charges.

“The Maldives authorities must clearly announce, and demonstrate, that they do not tolerate retaliatory raids by the police against protesters. Police and military must not act outside the law,” said Abbas Faiz. Amnesty International has asked the police authorities to make public the number of people they have arrested, and the number of people who had to receive medical treatment after their arrest. Police have so far not released these details.

Credible sources have told Amnesty International that the police and military arrested more than a dozen people during their raid on the MDP rally today. They arrested some more people in the hospital after they had gone to receive medical treatment for their injuries.

The detainees were taken to police detention centres in Malé, and were later transferred to Dhoonidhoo, an island close to Malé which is the main detention centre. The victims told Amnesty International that the military and police personnel shouted abusive words against the MDP when they raided their rally. One of the victims said: “They grabbed hold of my hair and pulled me up, shouting they would teach me a lesson for demonstrating against the new President.”

“When police officers act like political opponents towards demonstrators, they erode respect for the rule of law and cast doubt on their impartiality as officers of justice,” said Abbas Faiz. Nasheed said a day after his resignation that he had been forced to resign by elements in the police and military. His supporters took to the streets on 8 February in the cities of Malé and Addu, and were met with violence by the police and military who had sided with the new government.