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## **Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam: Amnesty International calls on the authorities to respect the freedom of assembly**

"The excessive force used by the Tanzanian police over the last four days in Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam in an attempt to prevent freedom of assembly is appalling," Amnesty International said today.

At least 37 people have reportedly been killed, including six police officers, and an unknown number injured when police used gas and live bullets to break-up demonstrations on the islands of Unguja and Pemba, Zanzibar, and in Dar es Salaam, organised by the opposition Civic United Front (CUF).

Amnesty International has received compelling reports that violence including rape and beatings were still being meted out late Sunday night to the local population on Pemba by members of the paramilitary police force drafted in from the mainland. At least 149 people have been arrested on the mainland and over 200 on the islands. A number of those arrested have been held in incommunicado detention and charged with unlawful assembly. Others are under police guard in hospital and their relatives have been denied access to visit them. There were reports that some of those charged have been tortured.

The demonstrations had been organised by the CUF to call for a rerun of the October presidential and parliamentary elections and reform of the constitution. The elections on Zanzibar were widely seen by observers to have been unfair. The police declared demonstrations by the CUF to be illegal and a threat to peace and stability. This ban was challenged by CUF on the grounds that the police did not have the legal authority to restrict freedom of assembly. The response of the police to this challenge was excessive.

On Thursday 25 January, the CUF Chairman and member of Parliament for Kigamboni, Professor Ibrahim Lipumba, was arrested violently by the police in Dar es Salaam with at least 50 others and charged with unlawful assembly. He remained in prison over the weekend as his bail was set very high.

On Friday 26 January two men were killed in Zanzibar town when the police fired on suspected members of the CUF shortly after they had left the mosque after prayers. The following day the police used live bullets and tear gas to disperse groups of people on both the island of Pemba and Unguja.

According to eye witnesses the order to disperse was almost immediately followed by shooting. Islanders reportedly responded by throwing stones and petrol bombs. The wounded were reportedly not able to receive treatment from government hospitals and following the introduction of a curfew, relatives on Pemba were not allowed to pick up or bury their dead. A

helicopter had reportedly been used on Pemba to drop tear gas on demonstrators. Large numbers of paramilitary police from the mainland were transferred onto the islands.

According to reports on Pemba they have been entering houses and raping, beating and looting since Saturday evening. It is not known how many people have been arrested on Pemba as many people have moved into the forest to avoid being attacked, but at least 24 people have been killed including four police officers.

Clashes between the police and demonstrators on Unguja resulted in the death of 13 people including two police officers and many injured. At least 238 people were arrested. Similar clashes occurred in Dar es Salaam on Saturday, although no one was killed, apparently because the police did not use live bullets.

At least 50 people have fled to Kenya by boat including 10 people with gunshot wounds seeking medical treatment. There have been unconfirmed reports that another boat carrying Zanzibaris sank in suspicious circumstances. A number of journalists attempting to report the violence have been harassed and Khatib Suliman was beaten by the police.

"The right to freedom of assembly is a fundamental human rights guaranteed under international human rights law that Tanzania has signed up to." said Amnesty International. "If the authorities do not allow the people of Zanzibar the right to meet and speak freely the situation can only get worse."

Amnesty International is calling on the government on Tanzania and the authorities of Zanzibar to institute thorough, independent and impartial investigations into all reports of excessive use of force by the police, and to punish those responsible. "The Tanzanian government must take effective action now to ensure that future public meetings and demonstrations can proceed peacefully," Amnesty International said.

## **Background**

The authorities on the semi autonomous island of Zanzibar have consistently attempted to stifle political opposition on the island over the last few years, for example by imprisoning members of the opposition. The situation has remained tense since the elections. The police had accused the CUF of being responsible for a number of explosions in government buildings since the elections and have arrested over 50 opposition supporters. The CUF have denied responsibility.

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