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News Flash

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Dominican Republic: police fire on trade unionists

Amnesty International is deeply concerned at reports that police in the Dominican Republic raided the office of a local trade union yesterday, 6 August, and opened fire on those inside in order to prevent them from carrying out a protest scheduled for later that afternoon in the capital, Santo Domingo.

"The authorities must immediately conduct a full and impartial enquiry into this worrying incident," Amnesty International said. "In addition, the organisation urges them to publicly reiterate their commitment to international standards governing the use of force by law enforcement officials."

At least three trade unionists were said to have been injured, and up to six others detained by police, during the 3:30 p.m. raid on the office of the *Central Nacional de Transportistas Unificados (CNTU)*, National Union of Unified Transport Workers. One activist, Ramón Pérez Figueroa, was said to have been treated in hospital for multiple shotgun pellet wounds in the hips and legs, as well as trauma in the chest and abdomen, reportedly after having been beaten by police as he tried to flee. Officers also fired tear gas.

It is not clear on what charges the detained trade unionists were being held. They had been meeting prior to the protest, which was scheduled for 5 p.m.

Background

The trade unionists were organizing an alternative version of the march which had opened the 14th PanAmerican Games in Santo Domingo on Friday 1 August. The alternative march, entitled 'Torch against Hunger,' *Antorcha contra el Hambre*, was organized in the context of months of repeated protests around the country against cost of living increases, price hikes for fuel and other commodities, power shortages; recent banking scandals and the impact of economic measures undertaken by the government of the Dominican Republic in order to meet the conditions required for a proposed agreement with the International Monetary Fund. Demonstrators have criticised the government's inversion of funds for the holding of the Games in spite of national economic difficulties.

A similar protest organized for 1 August to coincide with the opening of the PanAmerican Games, with a flaming cookpot on a dustbin as a mock 'torch', was reportedly dispersed by police firing tear gas and pellets as it began. Police claimed that marchers had not obtained official permission for the activity, while organisers insisted that the march had been peaceful, and that police were guilty of excessive use of force.

Public Document

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