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Taiwan: Police should avoid using excessive force at upcoming protests

Amnesty International has urged Taiwan's police force to comply with international guidelines on the use of force and crowd control at the planned student protests on Sunday 7 December.

The organization also joins calls for the Control Yuan, the body mandated by the Taiwan Constitution with supervisory power over the Executive branch, to conduct an independent inquiry into alleged excessive police force during November's protests.

The Wild Strawberry Student Movement has staged sit-ins since 6 November to protest against what they consider the use of excessive force during the Taiwan visit of Chen Yunlin, chairman of the China-based Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait. Civil society groups in Taiwan are investigating multiple claims that individuals suffered head injuries and broken fingers at the hands of police during the protests.

According to police reports on 8 November, approximately 10,000 police officers had been deployed during Chen's visit; 149 police officers and 200-300 individuals were injured; 18 were arrested.

Taiwanese civil society groups claim that police have applied the Assembly and Parade Law arbitrarily to silence dissent. According to the students' spokesperson, they will not seek police approval, as required by the law, but will only "report" their plans to law enforcement authorities, in line with amendments advocated by the Movement.

The Movement is organizing the protest on Sunday 7 December to criticize the government's failure to amend the Assembly and Parade Law.

Amnesty International said Taiwan's Control Yuan should address the serious concerns raised by civil society in Taiwan and the government should cease the practice of using the Assembly and Parade Law to deny freedom of assembly and allow individuals to protest peacefully. Amnesty International also called on Taiwanese police and judicial authorities to ensure that they investigate any protesters accused of engaging in violence in a fair, transparent, and timely manner in compliance with international standards.

Background

On 3-7 November 2008, Chen Yunlin, chairman of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits, led a 60-member delegation from the People's Republic of China to visit Taiwan and meet with President Ma Ying-jeou.

The police barred protesters displaying Taiwanese and Tibetan flags and anti-China slogans along the routes taken by the envoy and confiscated or damaged some of these items. The police also closed a shop near the hotel where Chen Yunlin had dinner with Kuomintang honorary chairman Lien Chan when the shop loudly broadcast music from an album titled 'Songs of Taiwan'.

There were additional reports of arbitrary detention and police brutality, some of which, according to the police, were in response to the violence of protesters.

Following the visit, hundreds of students have staged sit-ins across Taiwan protesting the police's handling of the protests and demanding amendments to the Assembly and Parade Law, which has been misused to prevent protests.

On 6 November the students started their sit-ins outside the offices of the Executive Yuan or (Executive branch), where they were eventually removed by police on the grounds of illegal assembly. They continued the sit-ins at the National Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall and organized a daily demonstration calling for immediate amendments to the Assembly and Parade Law, apologies from the president and head of government and the resignations of the heads of the police and national security.

On 18 November Taipei police announced a list of 66 "troublemakers", who had allegedly thrown gas bombs and stones at the police and spat at the Taichung mayor. There were also reports that the police had pressured journalists and their supervisors to hand over video tapes to identify suspects who allegedly took part in the violence.

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