

India: Urgent investigation needed as protests continue in Kashmir

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The Indian authorities must ensure an urgent, full and independent investigation into the killing of four demonstrators and the alleged use of live ammunition against protesters in Jammu and Kashmir, Amnesty International said today. "It is of vital urgency that the authorities launch swift, thorough and independent investigations into the killings and the other reports that police used excessive force against the ensuing protests across Jammu and Kashmir," said Shashikumar Velath, Programmes Director at Amnesty International India. The protests erupted in numerous towns and cities after paramilitary forces killed four demonstrators in Gool, Ramban district on 18 July. Dozens of people have subsequently been injured in widespread clashes between the police and protesters across the northern Indian state. Protesters in several towns and cities defied curfews put in place over the weekend, with some holding violent demonstrations. Security forces have reportedly used excessive force in response, including firing live ammunition against protesters. "All those responsible for injury and loss of life must be brought to justice. Impunity for security forces in Jammu and Kashmir has prevailed in too many cases in the past, including the very recent past. Authorities must take all measures necessary to ensure that those responsible are prosecuted in a civilian court of law," said Shashikumar Velath. Local residents in Ganderbal district have told journalists that two people were seriously injured on 19 July when the Jammu and Kashmir police and paramilitary forces from the Central Police Reserve Force (CRPF) opened fire at demonstrators, some of whom were throwing stones. The police have claimed that they only used pellet guns. There are also reports that on 19 July security forces fired live ammunition at protesters in Qazigund and Koimoi towns in southern Kashmir. Background On 18 July, four people were killed and 42 injured in Gool, Ramban district, when paramilitary personnel of the Border Security Force (BSF) opened fire on protesters demonstrating after the security forces allegedly roughed up a cleric. The BSF has stated that its forces fired in self-defence when the protesters turned violent. But eyewitnesses have said that the BSF personnel fired indiscriminately at protesters. A preliminary report by the Jammu and Kashmir police has also said the shooting by the BSF forces was "uncalled for" and "indiscriminate." India's Minister of Home Affairs and the Jammu and Kashmir state government have ordered investigations into the killings. Widespread impunity has prevailed for violations of international law in Jammu and Kashmir – including unlawful killings, extrajudicial executions, torture and the enforced disappearance of thousands of people since 1989. Security forces shot dead more than 100 young people amid protests in the summer of 2010 – most of these cases have not been fully investigated