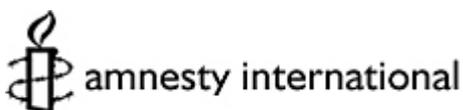


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Restraint urged in Iraq's Kurdistan Region following more protester deaths

Amnesty International has called on the Kurdistan regional government to rein-in militias affiliated to political parties who killed two protestors on Sunday, as anti-government demonstrations continue in the north of Iraq.

A 17-year-old boy, Serkho Mohammed, was shot dead yesterday as hundreds of demonstrators clashed with government security forces and armed militia belonging to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in the city of Sulaimaniya.

A second protester died in hospital today after being shot during the protests, which also left at least 30 people injured. Others were apparently arrested.

"These killings add fuel to an already volatile situation in Sulaimaniya and represent a very worrying, as well as tragic, development," said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"It is imperative that the authorities step in and prevent further killings and other abuses, and bring the KDP militia under control and accountable under the law."

Security forces reportedly opened fired and used tear gas on protesters trying to reach the KDP building, apparently in order to burn it down.

Armed KDP militia have killed three people in Sulaimaniya, including a 15-year-old boy, since protests began outside the party's main offices on 17 February. The protestors have been calling for an end to corruption.

"The Kurdish authorities must order an immediate independent investigation into these killings and those who perpetrated them must be brought to justice if, as it appears, the killings were unlawful," said Malcolm Smart.

Since the protests started on 17 February, several buildings of the opposition Goran (Change) party and the headquarters of a newly established TV and radio station have reportedly set on fire.

The KDP and another Kurdish party jointly hold power as the government of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

"The two political parties that jointly rule Iraq's three Kurdish provinces continue to

operate armed militia which act almost as a law unto themselves and have been permitted to commit human rights abuses with impunity," said Malcolm Smart.

A 'day of rage' has been organised for 25 February across Iraq where coordinated demonstrations are expected to take place calling for reforms, including an end to corruption.

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