

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# TÜRKİYE: “I CANNOT BREATHE”

## ALLEGATIONS OF TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF MASS PROTESTS BETWEEN 19 - 26 MARCH MUST BE INVESTIGATED

Amnesty International is urging Turkish authorities to carry out prompt, independent, impartial and effective investigations into the allegations of human rights violations including torture and other ill-treatment by law enforcement officials during and in the aftermath of the mass, largely peaceful protests between 19 – 26 March 2025.<sup>1</sup>

Tens of thousands of people participated in overwhelmingly peaceful mass rallies and protests across Türkiye in response to the detention of Ekrem İmamoğlu, Mayor of Istanbul and Presidential candidate of the opposition Peoples’ Republican Party (CHP), and 91 others working at and connected with the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality on 19 March 2025. İmamoğlu and 53 others were remanded in pretrial detention on 23 March.<sup>2</sup> These protests took place in the context of official rallies organized by the CHP. Several governorates including Istanbul, İzmir, Ankara and Manisa issued pre-emptive bans on all assemblies and in the case of Istanbul, restricted entry into and exit from the province when the ban was extended for another four days on 23 March after the initial four-day ban. In Istanbul, the bans were not initially enforced against tens of thousands of people who were at first able to gather for CHP rallies outside the Greater Istanbul Municipality in Saraçhane Square, but law enforcement officers intervened once the official rallies ended.

Following the CHP rallies, law enforcement officials used unnecessary and excessive force to disperse the crowds and according to the authorities, detained 1879 people, either at the location of the protests or from their homes, between 19-26 March across the country.<sup>3</sup> By the end of March, over 300 people – mainly university students from different provinces including Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir – were remanded in pre-trial detention while hundreds of others were subjected to judicial control measures, including house arrest, foreign travel bans and reporting requirements.<sup>4</sup> In Istanbul, seven journalists covering the protests in Saraçhane Square were detained in raids of their homes on 24 March.<sup>5</sup> An eighth journalist for whom an arrest warrant had also been issued was not at home but all eight have since been indicted under the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations (Law No. 2911).<sup>6</sup> Also on 24 March, three journalists covering the protests in

<sup>1</sup> On 18 March, the University of Istanbul revoked Mayor İmamoğlu’s university diploma which he had received in 1994, along with that of 27 others and he was taken into police custody on allegations of corruption and terrorism related offences. He was remanded in pre-trial detention on 23 March on corruption charges. Separate investigations under the two sets of charges are continuing as of beginning of June 2025. At the time of his detention, İmamoğlu was about to be confirmed as the main opposition People’s Republican Party candidate for the Presidential elections set to take place in 2028. A condition of candidature is the being a university graduate. By early June, further four waves of detentions had taken place with scores of elected representatives as well as employees of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and district municipalities in the province taken into custody.

<sup>2</sup> As of 23 May, 210 people have been taken into police custody in four separate waves of detentions in the criminal investigation launched against Ekrem İmamoğlu and the Metropolitan Municipality, at least 70 of those were remanded in pre-trial detention. <https://medyascope.tv/2025/05/23/dalga-dalga-ibb-operasyonlari-bugune-kimler-tutuklandi/>

<sup>3</sup> Minister of Interior Ali Yerlikaya, <https://x.com/AliYerlikaya/status/1905234130650243359>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/cvgp1x1rpj1o>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/ce8447jpr7po>

<sup>6</sup> The eight journalists are AFP photojournalist Yasin Akgül, NOW Haber journalist Ali Onur Tosun, freelance photojournalists Bülent Kılıç, Zeynep Kuray, Hayri Tunç, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality photojournalist Kurtuluş Arı and Bakırköy municipality photojournalist Gökhan Kam. Journalist Emre Orman was not detained. They are facing charges under Article 32.1 of the Law No. 2911 which criminalizes ‘failure to disperse from an unlawful demonstration despite warning’. Their prosecution and that of four lawyers also indicted under the same article was separated on 18 April 2025 at the first hearing at the Criminal Court of 1<sup>st</sup> Instance No. 62.

İzmir were also detained and later released on 27 March. In addition, police detained at least four lawyers who had been present at the rallies in Istanbul. They have also been indicted under Law No. 2911.<sup>7</sup>

According to internet watchdog NetBlocks<sup>8</sup>, during the first two days of the protests, the authorities imposed heavy restrictions on social media and messaging apps, including ordering social media platforms to block protest-related content. Major social media platforms such as X, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok and messaging apps, Telegram, Signal and WhatsApp, were subjected to bandwidth throttling starting at 7:00 on 19 March, when the detentions of the mayor and others took place. Internet bandwidth restrictions severely limited the ability of everyone to access information and news about what was happening. The restrictions were lifted after 42 hours, on 21 March.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Amnesty International's researchers obtained 16 testimonies from protesters and one from the lawyer of a protester who were subjected to unlawful police use of force during the largely peaceful protests in Istanbul, İzmir, Ankara and Kocaeli between 19 – 26 March. Amnesty International also spoke to the lawyers of several of the protesters whose rights were violated by law enforcement officials. Further, Amnesty International reviewed 36 Criminal Judgeships of Peace<sup>9</sup> decisions in Istanbul in which at least 32 of the detained protesters and/or their lawyers stated during the proceedings that they had been subjected to some form of ill-treatment by police. In addition, Amnesty International's Evidence Lab verified 53 videos from media coverage and other footage posted on social media of the same protests that show police unlawful use of force against largely peaceful protesters who took to the streets of Istanbul, İzmir, Ankara, Aydın, Eskişehir, Bursa, Kayseri, and Muğla.<sup>10</sup>

Amnesty International documented several instances of unlawful use of force by law enforcement officials against peaceful demonstrators between 19 and 26 March, including beating, kicking and dragging protesters on the ground and the unlawful use of water cannon, pepper spray, tear gas, kinetic impact projectiles, often at close range directly targeting individuals at the head and upper body that led to numerous injuries and even hospitalizations. All the information collected was assessed in accordance with international standards and the pertinent legal obligations the Turkish state has under the treaties it is a party to.

The collected evidence indicates that law enforcement officials attacked peaceful protesters who were either dispersing or not resisting. Individuals who were already restrained were also sometimes beaten by law enforcement officials with batons – and in several instances, kicked while on the ground or dragged along the street.

Law enforcement officials have not only breached the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, but the violence unleashed by some also violated the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Specifically, Amnesty International considers that in certain instances, law enforcement officials intentionally inflicted severe pain or suffering on individual protesters with the intention of punishing or intimidating them.

The majority of those interviewed by Amnesty International who were subjected to unlawful use of force by police are young people and for many this was their first experience of participating in a protest. Many expressed anxiety about ensuring their anonymity and underlined their reluctance to make formal criminal complaints regarding the police use of force. Some expressed concern about the risk of repercussions if they filed complaints; others expressed their lack of faith in their complaints being taken seriously or leading to redress for the ill-treatment they were allegedly subjected to, in the absence of medical reports. They were also concerned about their future employment prospects being hampered if their names were associated with such complaints. In particular, some of the 16 individuals interviewed, many of whom are subject to criminal prosecutions themselves, expressed specific additional concerns that filing criminal complaints against the police might have an adverse impact on the outcome of their cases.

Importantly, Amnesty International reviewed 36 Criminal Judgeships of Peace decisions following prosecutors' judicial controls requests regarding dozens of individuals some of whom were later interviewed by the researchers, which revealed that at least 32 of the detained protesters stated that they (or their lawyers mentioned that their client) had been subjected

<sup>7</sup> Indictment No. 2025/11935, 28 March 2025.

<sup>8</sup> <https://x.com/netblocks/status/1902230361968427206>

<sup>9</sup> Criminal Judgeships of Peace were established in 2014 to take decisions in the investigation phase of proceedings such as deprivation of liberty such as remand, administrative controls and reviews of appeals against such decisions. [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF\(2017\)004-e#:~:text=Criminal%20judgeships%20of%20peace%20were,courts%20of%20peace%20were%20annulled](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2017)004-e#:~:text=Criminal%20judgeships%20of%20peace%20were,courts%20of%20peace%20were%20annulled)

<sup>10</sup> The video footage that Amnesty International Evidence Lab verified and analyzed was posted on social media platforms between 19-28 March. These videos show the unlawful use of force against protesters between 19-26 March in Istanbul, İzmir, Ankara, Aydın, Eskişehir, Bursa, Kayseri, Kocaeli and Muğla.

to some form of ill-treatment by police during the hearings to determine whether they would be remanded in pretrial detention, released or released with judicial control measures. The statements in court were explicit and included specific allegations of beatings, abusive use of reverse handcuffs and other unnecessary force being used by law enforcement officials against them.

Correspondence with the Turkish authorities: On 25 April 2025, Amnesty International sent a right-of-reply letter to the Ministry of Interior to share a summary of the research findings with a view to include the authorities' responses and perspective, however, no reply was received by the time of publication.

## **BLANKET BANS FAILED TO MEET INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS**

The Governors of Istanbul, İzmir, Ankara issued pre-emptive blanket bans on all protests and meetings in their provinces for periods of up to 12 days. Subsequently, major roads and public transportation including key metro lines were closed in central Istanbul and restrictions on entry and exit to the city were announced when the initial ban was extended. Temporary road closures were also implemented in Ankara.<sup>11</sup>

The Governor of Istanbul banned all meetings, protests and press statements for four days, between 19-23 March.<sup>12</sup> The stated legal grounds of the decision were Article 11/C of the Law on Provincial Administration (Law No. 5442)<sup>13</sup> and Article 15/H of the Law on Police Duties and Powers (Law No. 2559), but there is no Article 15/H in the law. The initial decision to ban all protests and road closures was extended for a further four days from 22 March 2025 until 26 March at midnight. In its second decision to extend the blanket ban, the governorate also announced that "entry and exit of individuals, groups and vehicles likely to participate in illegal activities individually or collectively in Istanbul would not be permitted".<sup>14</sup>

On 21 March, the Governors of İzmir and Manisa banned all meetings, protests and press statements between 21-25 March "to maintain public order throughout the province and to prevent possible provocative actions"<sup>15</sup> and the Governor of İzmir later extended the ban for four more days.<sup>16</sup>

The Governor of Ankara stated<sup>17</sup> on 21 March that "according to provocative posts on some social media and similar platforms and other information obtained, it has been learned that unlawful meetings and demonstration marches followed by violent acts will be carried out by provoking the public to protest the operations carried out within the framework of the investigations by the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office" and thereby, pre-emptively banned all "indoor and outdoor meetings and demonstrations, press statements, tents, stands, sit-ins, petitions and similar actions

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.izmir.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi-21032025-02>, <http://www.izmir.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi-25032025-03>, <http://www.ankara.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi210325>, <http://www.ankara.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi2503>, <http://www.istanbul.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi-2025-25>, <http://www.istanbul.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi-2025-22>, <http://www.istanbul.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi-2025-21>, <http://www.istanbul.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi-2025-20>, <http://www.istanbul.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi-2025-19>, <http://www.manisa.gov.tr/basin--aciklamasi>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.istanbul.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi-2025-19>.

<sup>13</sup> Article 11/C of the Law No. 5442: It is the duty of the governor to ensure peace and security, personal inviolability, safety and public well-being and preventive law enforcement authority within the provincial borders. (Additional sentence: 25/7/2018-7145/1 Art.) The governor takes the necessary decisions and measures to ensure these.

(Additional paragraph: 25/7/2018-7145/1 Art.) In cases where public order or security is deteriorated in such a way as to stop or interrupt ordinary life or there are serious indications that it will be deteriorated, the governor may, for a period not exceeding fifteen days, restrict entry and exit to certain places in the province for persons suspected of disrupting public order or public security; regulate or restrict the circulation, gathering of persons, navigation of vehicles in certain places or at certain times, and prohibit the carrying and transportation of all kinds of weapons and bullets even if licensed. <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.3.5442.pdf>

Article 15 of the Law No. 2559 relates to the summoning of individuals for questioning by law enforcement; it does not contain measures relating to the banning of protests. The governorate decision document was not rectified after it was issued, assuming the reference to the inexistent article was a mistake. [Last accessed on 25 May 2025]

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.istanbul.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi-2025-23>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.izmir.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi-21032025-02> and <http://www.manisa.gov.tr/basin--aciklamasi>.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.izmir.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi-25032025-03>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.ankara.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi210325>

and activities, distribution of flyers, hanging banners and placards” for five days based on Article 17<sup>18</sup> and Article 19<sup>19</sup> of the Law on Demonstrations and Public Meetings (Law 2911) and Article 11 (A and C) of Law on Provincial Administration (Law 5442). The Governor of Ankara extended the ban decision for a further six days until the end of 1 April by stating, without reference to any concrete incidents, that: “It is observed that unauthorised protests and activities continue throughout our province, and that those participating in these protests use violence; threats are posed against the security of property and life of the public and public property is damaged.”<sup>20</sup>

Under international human rights law, generalized restrictions on peaceful assemblies are ‘presumptively disproportionate’. Any restrictions imposed on assemblies must instead be based on an individualized assessment by the authorities of the conduct of participants or of a particular assembly.<sup>21</sup> Any restrictions imposed which do not meet all elements of the “three-part test” (i.e. that the restrictions have a legal basis, pursue one or more legitimate aims, and are necessary and proportionate in pursuit of the aim(s)) constitute violations of the right to peaceful assembly. The governorates’ pre-emptive blanket bans imposed extensive and wide-ranging restrictions which do not pass the three-part test under international human rights law. These bans were manifestly disproportionate as they applied to overwhelmingly peaceful mass rallies which proceeded every night for a week and without making an individualized assessment of the necessity and proportionality of the restriction for each assembly.

In addition, the Istanbul governorate’s imposition of broadly framed restrictions on entry and exit into the province constituted a further unwarranted interference with the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of movement under international human rights law.<sup>22</sup>

## DISPERSAL AND THE USE OF FORCE

Amnesty International believes law enforcement officials breached international human rights law and standards by dispersing participants in peaceful assemblies, including through the unlawful use of tear gas, pepper spray, kinetic impact projectiles and beatings leading to injuries. Dispersal of an assembly must be an exceptional measure: where an imminent threat of serious violence cannot be addressed by less intrusive measures such as targeted arrests.<sup>23</sup> In addition, use of force should be avoided, and if it is necessary, must be restricted to the minimum extent necessary.<sup>24</sup>

Under both international and domestic law, the rights of people to gather peacefully and to express ideas and opinions are protected, and states have a positive duty to protect and facilitate the exercise of these rights. General Comment No. 37 of the Human Rights Committee clarifies State parties’ general obligations under Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which protects the right to peaceful assembly. In defining what constitutes a peaceful assembly, the General Comment states that “isolated acts of violence by some participants should not be attributed to others, to the organizers or to the assembly as such.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, “isolated instances of [violent] conduct will not suffice to taint an entire assembly as non-peaceful.”<sup>26</sup> Rather, only if violence by assembly participants is “*manifestly widespread within the assembly*” would participation in the gathering no longer be protected by the right of peaceful assembly.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Article 17 of the Law No. 2911: The governor or district governor may postpone a specific meeting for up to a maximum of one month for reasons of national security, public order, prevention of crime, protection of public health, public morality or protecting the rights and freedoms of others or may ban the meeting in case there is a clear and imminent threat of a crime being committed.

<sup>19</sup> Article 19 of the Law No. 2911: The provincial governor may postpone all meetings in one or more of the provinces included in the province or in one or more districts of a province for a period not exceeding one month for the purposes of national security, public order, prevention of crime, protection of public health and public morals or the rights and freedoms of others. (Amended second sentence: 30/7/2003-4963/22 Art.) Governors may also ban all meetings for a period not exceeding one month in one or more districts of a province based on the same reasons and in case there is a clear and imminent danger that a crime will be committed. A summary of the decision shall be announced in the places where the ban will be applied by the usual means. In addition, the Ministry of Interior shall be informed.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.ankara.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi2503>

<sup>21</sup> General Comment No. 37 (2020) on the right of peaceful assembly (article 21), para. 38, p.7, <https://docs.un.org/en/CCPR/C/GC/37>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. para. 99, p. 17

<sup>23</sup> General Comment 37 (2020), paras. 85 and 86

<sup>24</sup> Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, principle 13. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-use-force-and-firearms-law-enforcement>

<sup>25</sup> General Comment 37 (2020), para. 17

<sup>26</sup> General Comment 37 (2020), para. 19

<sup>27</sup> General Comment 37 (2020), para. 19

Only in exceptional cases may an assembly be dispersed.<sup>28</sup> Since the right of peaceful assembly protects *peaceful* assembly, not merely *lawful* assembly, a protest that remains peaceful (where violence by participants is not manifestly widespread), should continue to be protected and facilitated. Where a decision to disperse is taken in conformity with domestic and international law, use of force should be avoided. Where that is not possible in the circumstances, only the minimum force necessary may be used. As far as possible, any force used should be directed against a specific individual or group engaged in or threatening violence. Force that is likely to cause more than negligible injury should not be used against individuals or groups who are passively resisting. Even where the conduct of an individual protester is no longer peaceful (placing that individual outside the protection of the right of peaceful assembly), they retain other rights under the ICCPR, including their rights to life and to freedom from torture and other ill-treatment, which must continue to be protected.<sup>29</sup>

## UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials

Principles 12, 13 and 14 of the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials<sup>30</sup> outline the standards state authorities must abide by in the policing of unlawful assemblies.

*12. As everyone is allowed to participate in lawful and peaceful assemblies, in accordance with the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Governments and law enforcement agencies and officials shall recognize that force and firearms may be used only in accordance with principles 13 and 14.*

*13. In the dispersal of assemblies that are unlawful but non-violent, law enforcement officials shall avoid the use of force or, where that is not practicable, shall restrict such force to the minimum extent necessary. "[i]n the dispersal of assemblies that are unlawful but non-violent, law enforcement officials shall avoid the use of force or, where that is not practicable, shall restrict such force to the minimum extent necessary.*

*14. In the dispersal of violent assemblies, law enforcement officials may use firearms only when less dangerous means are not practicable and only to the minimum extent necessary. Law enforcement officials shall not use firearms in such cases, except under the conditions stipulated in principle 9.*

In its concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Türkiye,<sup>31</sup> the UN Committee against Torture (UNCAT) expressed “concern about allegation of excessive use of force by law enforcement in the context of policing and dispersal of policing and dispersing protests and the use of impermissible means of restraint in the context of public assemblies, such as reverse handcuffing, and about the apparently arbitrary application of Law No. 2911 on Public Meetings and Demonstrations to justify arrests that violate the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.” The Committee recommended that Türkiye “ban the use of restraint techniques that cause unnecessary pain and suffering, such as reverse handcuffing, and ensure that restraints are applied only as a measure of last resort, for the shortest possible period and subject to strict regulation, supervision, oversight and documentation.”

## DETENTION BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS

In Istanbul, despite the blanket ban in place, the opposition CHP rallies outside the main municipality building in Saraçhane Square in Istanbul's Fatih district were allowed to assemble and proceed for several hours. The CHP set up a stage on an open top bus, with speeches and music every evening from 19 to 25 March.

However, soon after the official rallies ended, police intervention began to disperse any remaining crowds. While the hundreds of protesters who were detained under Article 32.1 of the Law on Meeting and Demonstrations (Law No. 2911) which criminalizes ‘failure to disperse from an unlawful demonstration despite warning’, the majority of the protesters interviewed by Amnesty International stated that they did not hear any warnings by the police. Further, some of the protesters facing prosecution under Article 32.1 were detained from their homes some days after the protest they were

<sup>28</sup> General Comment 37 (2020), paras. 85 and 86

<sup>29</sup> General Comment 37 (2020), para. 9

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/firearms.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> The Committee Against Torture (14 August 2024), *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Türkiye* (CAT/C/TUR/CO/5), para. 23(c)

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FC%2FTUR%2FCO%2F5&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FC%2FTUR%2FCO%2F5&Lang=en)



alleged not to have dispersed from.<sup>32</sup> In one of the prosecutions, 30 protesters are indicted under the failure to disperse provision of Law No. 2911 although several were already in police custody on the day of the alleged offence.<sup>33</sup> Other charges levelled against protesters include 'carrying weapons and/or wearing face coverings during a protest' (Art 33.1 of the Law No. 2911), 'insulting the President' (Art 299 of the Turkish Penal Code) and 'incitement to commit a crime' (Art 214 of the Turkish Penal Code).

Amnesty International emphasizes that the criminalization of participation in a peaceful but 'unlawful' assembly, or indeed, of failure to disperse from an 'unlawful' demonstration, creates a serious risk of suppressing conduct that is protected under international human rights law. In particular, where the reason for an assembly being characterized as 'unlawful' is a banning order which is itself neither necessary nor proportionate, and/or where the dispersal of an assembly is unwarranted, the decision to ban is in violation of international human rights law.

Amnesty International observed four of the first six hearings in the prosecutions of hundreds of protesters on 18<sup>34</sup>, 21 and 25 April at the Istanbul Palace of Justice in Çağlayan in Şişli district. Almost all of those on trial stated in court that they were not aware of the Istanbul Governorate's provincial ban on protests. The few individuals who stated they were aware of the ban also said that, on seeing the rallies assembled without restriction, they assumed their participation would not be deemed unlawful. Many had seen the protests in the media, some had attended out of curiosity having seen the crowds while in the vicinity. When asked whether they had heard loudspeaker announcements for dispersal, almost all stated they had not, and that due to the bandwidth restrictions implemented by the authorities they were not able to access internet and social media platforms.

## ISTANBUL: BEATINGS AND UNLAWFUL USE OF LESS LETHAL WEAPONS IN ISTANBUL'S SARAÇHANE PARK

Amnesty International's research has documented the use of unlawful force, including beatings and the misuse of less lethal weapons, against largely peaceful protesters by law enforcement officials in Istanbul's **Saraçhane Square** between **19 - 26 March**. The research findings show that law enforcement officials unlawfully used pepper spray, tear gas and kinetic impact projectiles fired from close range directly towards protesters, often without warning or efforts at de-escalation. Such weapons were frequently deployed in circumstances where their use was either wholly unnecessary or disproportionate, contravening international human rights law and standards on the use of force. The use of less lethal weapons was typically accompanied by other forms of physical violence, including beating and kicking, with both batons and bare hands, underscoring a failure to respect the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and to protection from torture and other ill-treatment.

The majority of allegations of torture and other ill-treatment documented by Amnesty International researchers relate to incidents involving law enforcement officials, including both police officers wearing full-body armour and officers in civilian clothes, on the night of **23 March** in Saraçhane Square, Istanbul.

Evidence gathered by Amnesty International shows that law enforcement officials unlawfully used pepper spray against people who did not present any threat, often repeatedly and from a range of less than one metre likely to cause excessive harm. As a result, people were unable to safely leave the area and many sustained burning sensations on their bodies lasting for several days. When interviewed by Amnesty International,<sup>35</sup> 26 year-old protester, K.Ç., who was present in Saraçhane Square on **23 March**, explained how he found himself in the middle of a stampede after the police surrounded the crowd of around 200-300 people near Bozdoğan aqueduct, immediately after using pepper spray. K.Ç. stated that he was pepper sprayed on his face five or six times from a distance of less than one metre. He recounted being stuck in the middle of the crowd, unable to see and in pain as his foot was trapped. One of his shoes came off as he was trying to free

<sup>32</sup> On 8 April 2025, Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor announced that 819 people were indicted in 20 separate criminal investigations in relation to the protests between 19 – 26 March, <https://bianet.org/haber/imamoglu-eylemelerine-katilan-819-kisi-hakkinda-kamu-davasi-acildi-306267>.

<sup>33</sup> Indictment No. 2025/12156 at the Istanbul Criminal Court of 1<sup>st</sup> Instance No. 14. First hearing in the trial took place on 25 April, postponed to 10 October 2025. During their statements in court which was observed by a representative of Amnesty International, the protesters and their lawyers explained that they were in police custody on the date and time of the alleged offence of 'refusing to disperse from an unlawful demonstration'.

<sup>34</sup> The first two hearings of 189 protesters including eight journalists and four lawyers took place on 18 April. Access to the Istanbul Justice Palace in Çağlayan was severely restricted on the day, excluding the relatives of the protesters and some journalists who wanted to report from the proceedings but did not have the government issued turquoise press card from attending the hearings. Amnesty International's observer was eventually allowed to enter and observed one of the hearings.

<sup>35</sup> Telephone interview, 25 March 2025

his foot for fear it would be broken. Speaking to Amnesty International two weeks after the event, K.Ç. shared that the experience he had that night has severely worsened his preexisting agoraphobia.

‘Devrim’,<sup>36</sup> a student from Koç University who was also present in Saraçhane Square on **23 March** told Amnesty International that, as she was trying to help a friend who was overwhelmed by tear gas at around 23:30 near the Bozdoğan aqueduct, suddenly people started running. The student and her friend also started running away, all the while being pepper sprayed from less than metre away at their faces, fired at with kinetic impact projectiles. She told Amnesty International that afterwards, she realised the back of her head was swollen as a result of being repeatedly struck with batons. She explained that her rucksack had protected her back but later she noticed a rash on her back. Devrim shared an image of the red and white coloured kinetic impact projectiles – pepper balls – that the police were firing at the protesters, which she had collected from the ground that day.

Two protesters, H.E.A and M., who were together near the park in Saraçhane Square on **23 March** were also interviewed<sup>37</sup> by Amnesty International. They said that they were close to the police barricades at around 23:30 when police made one announcement to the crowd to disperse but then immediately proceeded to start using pepper spray without allowing time for people to leave. As the police pushed the crowd away with pepper spray and kinetic impact projectiles, people running away from police started to stumble over park fences and fell over each other, but police continued to use pepper spray and beat people on the ground. H.E.A. said approximately 30 people were on top of each other on the ground, and many were screaming “I cannot breathe.” When H.E.A. was able to get up, he was barely able to see his surroundings and tried to walk towards the metro station to leave the area, three police officers turned towards him and directed pepper spray all over his upper body from a close range. Another police officer hit his stomach area with a baton, causing severe pain that required him to go to a hospital later that night. M. stated that when she fell, she lost her right shoe but could not pick it up. As she tried to run to protect herself, another police officer grabbed and pulled her hair causing her to fall on the ground once again. Both H.E.A and M. emphasized the severity of the mental harm they experienced and added that the police circled and chased the protesters so that whatever direction they ran to leave the area, they would face the police. M. said that the police directed pepper spray at her face from a distance of around 30 centimeters. Both stated that they experienced painful burning sensations on their skin, particularly on their legs and arms, for two days.

## UNLAWFUL USE OF KINETIC IMPACT PROJECTILES BY POLICE RESULTED IN INJURIES

During the protests at Saraçhane Park, police routinely used kinetic impact projectiles<sup>38</sup> as a weapon for dispersal, which is unlawful according to international guidelines on the use of less-lethal weapons.<sup>39</sup> Any limited use of kinetic impact projectiles must be targeted specifically against persons engaged in serious violence against other persons, and even then, only when other means have failed to stop the violence. However, police fired kinetic impact projectiles at individuals who posed no immediate threat to others of severe injury or death. In several cases, police use of kinetic impact projectiles caused injuries on peoples’ bodies and faces, including their nose, chin and eyes. Kinetic impact projectiles were frequently fired together with the use of tear gas and pepper spray.

M.A. was in Saraçhane Square on **23 March** close to the police lines when the police used pepper spray to disperse the protesters. While trying to move away from police, he turned back to see what was behind him when a kinetic impact projectile hit his eye and he fainted. Other protesters helped and carried him to an ambulance. In the following days, he had to go through vitrectomy surgery<sup>40</sup> and at the time of publication he stated that the full recovery of his vision was unlikely.

34 year-old Metin Özken<sup>41</sup> was present at the protest in Saraçhane Square on **22 March** in the evening. At around 20:30, he was in the middle of the crowd near the Bozdoğan aqueduct when he was hit just above the right eyebrow by a kinetic impact projectile – most likely a pepper ball – fired by police which caused him an injury and bleeding. He told Amnesty International that he could not open his eye and had trouble breathing for a couple of hours. At around 23:00, he managed to make his own way to an ambulance where his wound was treated. The mark left from the impact was still

<sup>36</sup> Not her real name, telephone interview, 4 April 2025

<sup>37</sup> Telephone interview, 8 April 2025

<sup>38</sup> Kinetic impact projectiles (KIPs) are blunt impact projectiles meant to be fired at a person from a certain distance, commonly made of rubber, plastic or other materials. During the protests in question, law enforcement officials mainly used small spherical plastic balls containing a powder that is designed to break on impact and cause irritation to the skin and eyes.  
<https://www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2024/03/Kinetic-impact-projectiles.pdf?x90417>

<sup>39</sup> United Nations Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement, 2020,  
[https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CCPR/LLW\\_Guidance.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CCPR/LLW_Guidance.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/vitrectomy>

<sup>41</sup> Face to face interview, 18 April 2025

visible to the Amnesty International researcher interviewing him almost a month after the incident.<sup>42</sup> Metin Özken was detained from his home two days after the protest in a dawn raid on 24 March. He recounted that detaining officers reverse handcuffed him with cable ties very tightly, forcing his head down as he was being taken into the Anti-Terrorism Branch at Istanbul Security Directorate at Vatan Avenue. A metal hook on one of his boots got tangled with the laces and he fell down awkwardly onto his already bent right elbow. Özken explained that his arm was so painful he had difficulty undressing.

C.N., another protester who was at Saraçhane Park on **20, 21, 22 and 23 March**, stated<sup>43</sup> that during the first couple of nights the protesters wanted to march towards Taksim in central Istanbul, but the police prevented them from doing so. C.N. told Amnesty International it was clear that the protesters around him did not want to confront the police or use violence because they were telling each other to remain calm. **On 20 March**, he was close to the police cordon when they used pepper spray and kinetic impact projectiles directly on his face and body. He said, “they were trying to pepper spray directly into the eyes.” One of the kinetic impact projectiles hit his chin, causing bruising and swelling. He said they were three to five meters away from the police and another kinetic impact projectile hit only one centimetre below his friend’s eye. According to his testimony, the police also tried to detain him by grabbing and pulling him from the crowd – kicking him in the stomach area and causing further bruising. **On 21 March**, he was further away from the police lines but this time a kinetic impact projectile – most likely a pepper ball - hit his nose. He experienced pain and burning sensations all over his body for over a week.

## BEATINGS AMOUNTING TO TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Amnesty International found that there were also multiple incidents in Istanbul where law enforcement officials beat protesters with batons and bare hands and kicked and dragged people along the ground causing head, back, leg and stomach injuries. At least one person was hospitalized due to severe stomach pain after being beaten by police on his stomach with a baton.

The organisation also documented that journalists covering the protests were also subjected to beatings and unlawful use of less lethal weapons by law enforcement officers. Y.Ç., a journalist covering the protests in Saraçhane Square on **20 March** at around 20:30, was beaten as he filmed a police intervention on students inside the Saraçhane park near the police cordon. Police grabbed and pulled him behind the police cordon, which Y.Ç. described as three to four lines deep. There, at least ten riot police officers punched, kicked and elbowed him. He also stated that he felt being hit with a hard object which he said could have been the pepper spray gas canister. As he was being hit, someone he believes was a ranking officer shouted, ‘don’t hit him on the head.’ The beating only stopped after he was able to convince the officers that he was a journalist and was allowed to show his press card. Amnesty International examined his forensic medical record<sup>44</sup> which includes the references to the bruising and scratches he sustained when he was being beaten.

Another protester, U.L.<sup>45</sup> was also present on Saraçhane Square on **23 March**. He was near the Bozdoğan aqueduct where several hundred people were assembled. While a few small fireworks (*torpil*) were being thrown by some of the protesters, U.L. stated that he did not throw anything himself. Without any announcement, police started firing kinetic impact projectiles and used pepper spray on the assembled crowd. U.L. who wears prescription glasses was affected by the pepper spray used on people around him. He moved away towards the park, taking his glasses off and wiping his face with his sleeve. Suddenly, a police officer grabbed his right hand in which he was also holding his glasses and bent his arm behind his back. He said, ‘I am holding my glasses, I cannot see without them.’ The police officer then took the glasses and broke them, further bending his arm and forcing him to bend forward. U.L. was reverse handcuffed with cable ties. Around six or seven riot police started kicking and slapping him including on his face and head. One of them gave him a flying kick on his right upper body. U.L. stated that some of his teeth loosened as a result of the beating he was subjected to. He was also subjected to threats and insults, including the police making threats of committing sexual violence towards his mother and sister. He described how, as they were beating him, they said: “I will fuck your mother, your sister. Son of a bitch. We haven’t slept for 36 hours, what are you doing here? Here, take this for democracy!” U.L. didn’t say or do anything because of the threats which he repeated during the interview: ‘if you move, I will fuck your mother, if you speak, I will fuck your sister’.

One of the police officers hit U.L. in the back of the knee, making him fall face down. Another officer kicked him on the head, which U.L. thinks was when his nose was cracked. Another police officer came and said ‘mates, enough’. U.L. was

<sup>42</sup> Photo taken on 18 April, on file.

<sup>43</sup> Telephone interview, 11 April 2025

<sup>44</sup> Forensic report, 20 March 2025, Ref No: 36566616, issued by SBÜ Haseki Training and Research Hospital, Istanbul.

<sup>45</sup> Face to face interview, 17 April 2025



then lifted up and taken by a water cannon vehicle near the aqueduct. All the present officers started hitting him again, including with their helmets, again hitting him on the back of his knee which made him fall down. An officer pressed on his back with his foot 2-3 times and kicked him on the right leg. Next to him, there were two other men, and a woman also detained. U.L. stated that he saw police officers banging the woman's head on the water cannon vehicle, and that she was screaming in pain. All four were kept near the water cannon for about two hours – including about 15 minutes on their knees. The police officers were periodically hitting them during this time – all in all, he thinks the beatings lasted 30-45 mins. U.L. said he was taken to the Eyüp Sultan state hospital at around 1:00 with 16 others. “I was covered in blood on the bus. At the hospital my handcuffs were removed, and two police officers took me to the bathroom, I looked at my face in the mirror. There I saw the state of my face. There was blood from my nose up to my neck and dried up blood on my forehead. They made me clean up my face. My nose hurt a lot when I touched it, and I had black eyes. I was then taken to see the doctor. The door was kept open and one police officer stood immediately inside the room by the open door.”

In order to guarantee confidentiality, medical examinations should not, as a rule, be carried out within the sight or hearing of police officers. Troublingly, U.L. recounted to Amnesty International that the police officer accompanied him into the consultation room, and when the doctor asked, ‘tell me what happened’, the officer raised his eyebrows looking at U.L., as if to say, ‘don’t you dare.’ “I told the doctor that ‘there was an accident at home, that I fell.’ The doctor didn’t ask anything else.” Amnesty International examined the temporary medical report issued by the hospital. The details recorded in the report included references to small scratches and an abrasion on the forehead.<sup>46</sup> Amnesty International also examined a second medical examination report dated 25 March 2025, in which ‘pain on the right femur and left pelvis, frontal dermal abrasions and oedema on the left eye, extensive muscle and joint pain across the body’ were recorded.<sup>47</sup>

U.L. said he was still finding it difficult to lift his right leg, that he was still in pain as a result of the alleged beating, over three weeks later. During the interview with Amnesty International, he showed his right knee which was wrapped in supportive bandage. U.L. was remanded in pre-trial detention on 26 March until 10 April and is facing prosecution under Article 32/1 of the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations. His first hearing along with 62 others is on 19 September 2025. Speaking to Amnesty International again on 29 May, U.L. confirmed that he had not filed a criminal complaint about the ill-treatment he alleges because “you cannot complain about the state to the state. Our confidence in the justice system has been shaken. Even if I complain I know that the conclusion will be ‘lack of grounds for legal action’, nothing will come out of it.”<sup>48</sup>

Amnesty International spoke to the lawyer<sup>49</sup> of a 27-year-old university student who wishes to remain completely anonymous. The student was present in Saraçhane Square **on 22 March**. At around midnight after the end of the rally, people around her started to run as the police intervention began. In a statement the student shared through her lawyer, she stated: “I was trying to calm people down around me. But then suddenly, someone pulled me by the hair, then I was kicked on my back and I fell on the ground.” The student also suffers from a diagnosed chronic neurological illness and said to the police “I am ill, please don’t hit me. But the police officer said, ‘I don’t care.’ Then I was reverse handcuffed. As I was being taken through a corridor of riot police, they were shouting ‘terrorist, traitor, child of a bitch’ and they were kicking me. I was kicked so much that I couldn’t walk properly, I kept falling down. They dragged me while I was on my knees. I thought I would die. I realised I was having a panic attack which I was happy about. I thought if my heart is strained enough, I’d have a heart attack and that would make me die faster so that I would die before being tortured more.” The student’s lawyer told Amnesty International that the police officer stayed in the consultation room when her client was taken for a medical check at the hospital and that, when asked whether she had been subjected to ill-treatment, she said ‘no’. Later, the lawyer showed a video to Amnesty International researcher in which her client can be seen being taken away by three police officers, visibly limping. The lawyer also stated that her client had not been provided with her prescribed medication during the four days she was held in police custody.

24-year-old M.Y.<sup>50</sup> was with his cousin in the vicinity of Saraçhane Square at around 23:00 on **25 March**. They saw the crowd and were curious. He knew about the CHP rally but had not gone there to attend it. Sometime later, as the rally was ending, they decided to leave the Square at the same time the police intervention began. He and his cousin were surrounded by seven or eight police officers, some of whom were riot police. They started hitting M.Y. and his cousin with

<sup>46</sup> ‘Temporary medical report’ seen by Amnesty International states U.L. had an abrasion on his forehead and some scratches around the eye, dated 24 March 2025 at 01:18. The report further states ‘the patient who was brought in by the police stated he didn’t have any complaints’ which is consistent with U.L.’s account to Amnesty International. Report on file. Ref No: A-177295-4400-023.

<sup>47</sup> Medical examination report issued by Şişli Etfal hospital, dated 25 March 2025 at 22:28. Available on file. Ref No: 835380

<sup>48</sup> Phone conversation, 29 May 2025

<sup>49</sup> Face to face interview, 20 April 2025

<sup>50</sup> Face to face interview, 25 April 2025

batons, kicking and punching them, while cursing at them. M.Y. was pushed to the ground and kicked by several officers while on the ground. After about five minutes of the beating, M.Y. and his cousin were taken towards the aqueduct where the detention buses were stationed. He was reverse handcuffed tightly with cable ties. M.Y. described how, while handcuffed, he was subjected to further ill-treatment. He was made to lay face down and kicked on the legs and back. One officer hit him with the heel of his boot on M.Y.'s left cheek at least six times. He told Amnesty International that for almost two weeks, he was not able to open his mouth due to intense pain on his face and jaw. He was kept in reverse handcuffs for at least six hours and taken to the hospital for the medical check before police custody at around 6:00 am. By then, his hands were very swollen and had started to become purple. During the medical consultation which was conducted in private but with a security guard at the door, M.Y. showed the doctor all the signs of ill-treatment and he believes these details were recorded in the medical report at the hospital.<sup>51</sup> Amnesty International examined M.Y.'s statement<sup>52</sup> to the Istanbul Security Directorate in which he gave an account of the ill-treatment he was subjected to during his detention. On 27 March, M.Y. repeated his allegations of ill-treatment at the Istanbul Criminal Judgeship of Peace No.1. where he was referred to be remanded in pre-trial detention.<sup>53</sup> 'The judge didn't listen to anything I said and waved me away [to be sent to prison],' he said during his interview with Amnesty International. M.Y. remained in pre-trial detention until 15 April and was conditionally released on house arrest. He is prosecuted for 'carrying weapons and/or wearing face coverings during a protest' (Art 33.1 of the Law No. 2911) because he was carrying a motorcycle helmet when he was detained. Because of his imprisonment and subsequent house arrest, M.Y. had lost his job as a barista at the time of his interview with Amnesty International. The Istanbul Criminal Court of 1<sup>st</sup> Instance No. 50 lifted M.Y.'s house arrest at the first hearing on 25 April 2025 which was observed by Amnesty International.

## THE CASE OF EREN ÜNER – ALLEGATIONS OF TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT IN POLICE CUSTODY

Amnesty International interviewed 23-year-old Eren Üner,<sup>54</sup> a second year Istanbul University student who has made very serious and credible allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in police custody on the night of **24/25 March**. Üner was detained from his home at around 22:30 on 24 March and brought to Istanbul Security Directorate after sharing on his social media account earlier that day, screen shots of images posted by on-duty law enforcement officials on their social media accounts which appeared to show people in their custody who were showing signs of ill-treatment. Üner alleges being subjected to physical and psychological violence and threats of sexual violence by six police officers for six hours between 23:00 and 05:00 approximately while in police detention. On 8 April 2025, Eren Üner filed a criminal complaint to the Istanbul Public Prosecutor regarding his allegations of torture and ill-treatment which he shared with Amnesty International.

Describing his detention, he said: "The police put me in reverse handcuffs, escorted me out of the house, and placed me in an unmarked police car. Two vehicles had come to pick me up. The vehicle I was put into had plainclothes police officers, while the other vehicle carried their superiors. Before we started the journey, their superior shouted "crush him" from his vehicle. First, we went to the hospital for the medical checkup. My handcuffs were not removed, and the police officer did not leave the room while I was examined. After leaving the hospital and being put back into the vehicle, their superior switched from his vehicle to the one I was in. During the 10-15 minute journey to the Security Directorate in Vatan Avenue, I was slapped, punched, and kicked."

Eren Üner was taken into the Cyber Security Branch at the Security Directorate. He stated there were six police officers in the interrogation room, one of whom was an officer whose social media post he had shared. He was repeatedly asked which organization he is a member of. Üner said, "in the interrogation room, I was subjected to all kinds of physical and psychological violence. During this time, they tried to pin various crimes on me. They claimed that one of the riot police officers whose post was among the ones I shared had a note saying 'COWARD' left on the door [of his home], and that I was the one who left it. I absolutely refused to accept this, and the more I refused, the more they continued to beat me. They said they would hand me over to the riot police and that they would kill me. They even used the exact phrase, 'we'll put you in through the back door of the riot police bus, and your corpse will come out the front door.' For a while, they stopped beating me. During that time, I kept saying, 'why are they doing this, I didn't do anything wrong, I didn't commit a crime.' They said: 'How do you know you haven't done anything illegal?' I said that I had asked a woman lawyer I know. When I said this, they said they would rape the lawyer I mentioned, using the exact words, 'We work 24 hours, we don't

<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, despite repeated attempts, Amnesty International was not able to examine the medical report which M.Y.'s lawyer could not locate in his file.

<sup>52</sup> Security Directorate questioning, 26 March 2025

<sup>53</sup> Istanbul Criminal Judgeship of Peace No. 1, Remand decision ref no: 2025/269, 27 March 2025

<sup>54</sup> Face to face interview, 21 April 2025

see a woman's face, let your lawyer come and we'll fuck her.' They said that the lawyer I mentioned had incited me [to post the images]. I denied it and they started physically assaulting me again."

Eren Üner described how officers tried to touch his private parts, threatened him with sexual violence and made abusive comments including calling him a 'faggot'. "From the beginning of the torture, the superiors said they would insert a baton into me and asked for a baton from the other police officers, but this did not happen. Additionally, the superiors said they would photoshop me naked and share it on my own social media, and that older homosexual people would come to the front of my house and masturbate. They also said that because I spoke in a formal manner and constantly addressed them as 'officer sir,' I was homosexual. Their superior later said that I was pretending to be crazy to escape punishment and physically assaulted me."

Eren Üner was taken to hospital for another medical check before his transfer to the Istanbul Palace of Justice in Çağlayan. Again, a police officer remained in the consultation room, preventing him from making a detailed report of the torture and other ill-treatment he was subjected to. At the end of May 2025, Amnesty International reviewed two medical examination reports from SBÜ Haseki Training and Research Hospital issued three hours apart on 25 March 2025, the earlier of which outlines the injuries Eren Üner had sustained during his detention at the Istanbul Security Directorate Cyber Crimes Branch.<sup>55</sup> Another medical report issued following Eren Üner's examination at the Metris prison on 26 March 2025 also contains references to the severe bruising including on both his ears which he stated occurred when he was detained.<sup>56</sup>

Istanbul Criminal Judgeship of Peace No.10 ordered Eren Üner's remand in pre-trial detention for 'unlawfully obtaining or sharing personal information' under Article 136/1 of the Turkish penal code. He was taken to Istanbul's Metris prison where prison authorities requested him to be taken back to a hospital for a further medical check because of the signs of ill-treatment and that a medical report had not been issued previously. He was prosecuted, convicted and sentenced to three years and nine months for three counts of unlawfully obtaining or sharing personal information on 9 April 2025 by the Istanbul Criminal Court of 1st Instance No. 64 at the first hearing of his trial.<sup>57</sup>

Amnesty International is concerned following the Law Enforcement Agency's announcement<sup>58</sup> on 21 April that they will make a criminal complaint about Eren Üner following his detailed and public account<sup>59</sup> of the ill-treatment and torture he is alleging he was subjected to on the social media platform X on 20 April which had over 11 million views. Eren Üner's X account was "withheld in Türkiye in response to a legal demand" on 30 April. At the end of May, Eren Üner's lawyer confirmed with Amnesty International that a new criminal investigation under Articles 301 (denigrating the Turkish nation) and 217A (spreading disinformation) of the Turkish penal code had been launched against him following his statements during a press conference organized by the CHP in Parliament on 24 April. As of 1 June, Eren Üner's criminal complaint dated 8 April 2025 about his allegations of torture and other ill-treatment was still open. His lawyer informed Amnesty International that, on 27 May 2025, an inspector took Eren Üner's detailed statement in the context of an administrative review of the police officers involved.

## **ANALYSIS OF VIDEO EVIDENCE: USE OF UNLAWFUL FORCE BY LAW ENFORCEMENT IN ISTANBUL**

Video evidence examined by Amnesty International Evidence Lab shows many of those subjected to unlawful use of force were not resisting the police and posed no apparent threat. The beatings were administered in clear violation of international standards governing the use of force and often continued after individuals had been restrained. These acts were not isolated incidents but appeared to be systematic and targeted at protestors who posed no apparent threat, many of whom were peacefully standing, retreating, or already subdued. Amnesty finds that the nature of these beatings, particularly committed as they were by law enforcement officials against individuals who were not resisting or had already been restrained, meets the threshold for cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and in some cases, may amount to torture.

Amnesty International also verified 28 videos depicting law enforcement interventions which violated the human rights of protestors in Istanbul's Saraçhane Square between 19-26 March 2025. The majority of these videos were filmed during

<sup>55</sup> Medical report dated 25/03/2025 at 18:54 Ref: 181734 states that 'multiple linear hyperaemic and dermabrasions were observed on the neck and left shoulder'; on file. The second report dated 25/03/2025 at 22:45 Ref: 181747 contradicts the first one, stating that there are no signs of ill-treatment. Also on file.

<sup>56</sup> Medical report dated 26/03/2025, Ref: 5167; on file.

<sup>57</sup> Prosecution casefile No. 2025/184

<sup>58</sup> <https://x.com/EmniyetGM/status/1914305177688932432>

<sup>59</sup> <https://x.com/erennuner/status/1913957557430882465?s=46>. After his X account was suspended, Eren Üner also shared the same thread on his BlueSky account which can be accessed here: <https://bsky.app/profile/erennuner.bsky.social/post/3lo26qrmtdk2p>

the protests held on **23 March** and shows law enforcement officials fire kinetic impact projectiles and use large amounts of tear gas and pepper spray against a crowd that was already dispersing and without making any reasonable effort to limit the risk of injury. Police subjected demonstrators to repeated beating with batons and hands as well as kicking them.

The video footage verified by Amnesty International corroborates testimonies of protesters in Saraçhane on 23 March and shows that law enforcement officials routinely used kinetic impact projectiles, tear gas, and pepper spray not as a last resort, but as standard tools for dispersing crowds, often without warning or efforts at de-escalation. The use of these weapons was typically accompanied by physical violence, including beating and kicking, with both batons and bare hands, underscoring a failure to respect the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and protection from torture and other ill-treatment.

Several videos filmed in the vicinity of the aqueducts in Saraçhane, show law enforcement officials firing tear gas canisters directly at protesters, including aiming towards the head and from a close distance. They also show the use of pepper spray against people who do not present any threat and often from a very short distance likely to cause excessive harm. The police officers continue to spray at the heads and the upper part of the body even when protesters huddle together with their backs facing the law enforcement officers in an attempt to disperse.<sup>60</sup> Video footage taken on the evening of 24 March shows protesters running away, covering their noses and mouth from the tear gas and pepper spray, with police in full-body armour using tear gas and kinetic impact projectiles as they are fleeing and posing no threat.<sup>61</sup> Further footage shows police using pepper spray against individuals, some of whom had participated in the protests but at that point were simply walking around Saraçhane Park towards the Vezneciler Metro station nearby.<sup>62</sup>

Journalists were also targeted with unnecessary use of force including the use of pepper spray.<sup>63</sup> In a video posted on 23 March, a group of media workers can be seen recording a whirling dervish performance.<sup>64</sup> In this video, other protesters are also seen chanting in what appears to be a peaceful protest. The police start using tear gas in close range against protesters, including spraying the journalists.

During the protests at Saraçhane Park, police routinely used kinetic impact projectiles as a weapon for dispersal, which is unlawful according to the international guidelines on the use of less-lethal weapons.<sup>65</sup> Amnesty International's sound and video analysis shows that on 23 March police carried and fired from dozens of hand-held launchers. The kinetic impact projectiles were usually fired together with tear gas and the use of pepper spray at close range. Police fired towards people who were trying to disperse or run away. For example, in a 2:22 long video recorded at Saraçhane Park,<sup>66</sup> sounds of firing kinetic impact projectiles are heard for almost two minutes where protesters are seen running away, alongside the use of tear gas and pepper spray. At least two people can be seen injured and lying on the ground in the video. Police also fired kinetic impact projectiles at individuals who posed no imminent threat. Another video shows an individual on the ground, isolated from other protesters and at least seven launchers firing in his direction while dozens of police approaching him.<sup>67</sup> As per international guidelines on the use of kinetic impact projectiles, they should be used only when other means have been exhausted and not against crowds, but rather against an individual who poses a serious threat such as death or serious injury to other people and could not be restrained through other means.

Video evidence from the 23 March protests in Saraçhane further shows that law enforcement officials used beatings as a routine method of dispersal, rather than as a targeted or necessary response to any specific threat. This violence also included the use of tear gas, pepper spray, and kinetic impact projectiles to break up the protest.<sup>68</sup> In multiple incidents captured on video, police are seen repeatedly striking protesters with batons, kicking them while on the ground, and punching individuals.<sup>69</sup> As video evidence examined by Amnesty International shows many of those subjected to such

<sup>60</sup> <https://x.com/rojdaaltintas/status/1903901911960461626>, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/OsFbKPK0XR4>

<sup>61</sup> <https://x.com/firatfstk/status/1904267879043744229?s=46&t=wbVDaG6MnHLns9nEBswmzA>

<sup>62</sup> <https://x.com/defduckk/status/1903930263970722268>, <https://vimeo.com/1069713151>

<sup>63</sup> <https://x.com/puleragama/status/1903931357979385997?t=mk4lriaZaEDcLa6DaYCKag&s=08>, <https://x.com/puleragama/status/1903851859367837978>

<sup>64</sup> <https://x.com/puleragama/status/1903851859367837978>

<sup>65</sup> <https://x.com/rojdaaltintas/status/1903901911960461626>, <https://www.instagram.com/serkanocak/reel/DHhWroziLyT/>

<sup>66</sup> <https://vimeo.com/1068978779>

<sup>67</sup> <https://x.com/Ecumenopolis/status/1904135529353867561>

<sup>68</sup> <https://x.com/dokuz8haber/status/1905265380391518296?s=46>

<sup>69</sup> <https://x.com/t24comtr/status/1903866279422763184>, <https://x.com/puleragama/status/1903920945909137779>

<https://x.com/serkanocakkk/status/1903930020034437532>, <https://x.com/puleragama/status/1903919398986846225>

<https://x.com/puleragama/status/1903922796901564885>, <https://vimeo.com/1069055189>, <https://vimeo.com/1069714903>

<https://vimeo.com/1068978779>, <https://vimeo.com/1068979046>, <https://vimeo.com/1068979142>, <https://vimeo.com/1069052091>,

<https://vimeo.com/1069055138>

unlawful force were not resisting arrest and posed no apparent threat. In several instances, protesters were already retreating or were subdued when they were attacked by police.

The beatings were administered in clear violation of international standards governing the use of force and often continued after individuals had been restrained. The prevalence of such attacks signposts potential structural failings - in particular, a failure to prevent human rights violations by taking all necessary precautions in the planning, preparation and conduct of the policing operation.

The sustained and apparently gratuitous nature of beatings, particularly against individuals who were not resisting or had already been restrained, meets the threshold for cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and in some cases, may amount to torture. For example, in one video, police are dispersing the protesters with tear gas and kinetic impact projectiles and then start kicking the protesters. They catch one protester that seems to be standing and then several police officers start hitting him at least 13 times.<sup>70</sup> Beatings in the Sarayane park and surrounding streets have been captured in other videos, where protesters are seen dragged on the street, hit and kicked in the back and in the upper torso and the head multiple times<sup>71</sup> and then subjected to pepper spray at close range.<sup>72</sup>

## İZMİR: BEATINGS AND UNLAWFUL USE OF WATER CANNONS

M.K., a photojournalist in İzmir who spoke to Amnesty International recounted how he was subjected to ill-treatment by police when taking photographs during a protest<sup>73</sup> in the Bayraklı area on **21 March**. He said that at around 22:30, police used tear gas and kinetic impact projectiles on protesters. M.K. bent down due to the effect of tear gas at which point he tripped and fell down. Three or four police officers surrounded him and kicked him a few times on the ground. He felt a blow to his groin and a pain in his calf. He screamed “what are you doing? I am a journalist. My card is around my neck.” At this point, the officers stopped and checked his press card. Three days later on 24 March, M.K. was detained from his home and questioned at the İzmir Anti-Terrorism Branch for “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” and “resisting the police.” He was released from police custody on 27 March without his statement being taken by a prosecutor or being brought in front of a judge. Amnesty International examined the statement M.K. gave to the anti-terrorism branch in which he referred to being kicked in his groin and that he could not see any identifying numbers on the officers who had kicked him.<sup>74</sup> As of the beginning of June, no prosecution had been initiated against the journalist.

Amnesty International spoke to E.K.,<sup>75</sup> a teacher who joined a protest at the Dokuz Eylül University Tinaztepe campus on **21 March**. E.K stated that when they arrived at the campus exit, they were met with four water cannon vehicles and a police barricade that prevented them from marching further. At least two water cannons in high pressure mode were used directly on their upper bodies. When the protesters approached the police barricade further, E.K stated that the police opened a gap between their shields, grabbed E.K by his arm while hitting him with a baton. He said that he was dragged on the ground while several riot police officers beat and kicked him. He was detained that day with 11 other protesters. A verified video by Amnesty International, posted on Instagram on 21 March, corroborates the incident E.K. shared. The video shows protesters peacefully marching in front of the Dokuz Eylül University Tinaztepe campus where jets of water hit the crowds. In at least two instances water jets targeted individuals in the upper parts of their bodies, including their heads.<sup>76</sup>

Water cannons should only be used under strictly defined circumstances and only when its use is lawful, necessary, and proportionate for the legitimate law enforcement objective.<sup>77</sup> The use of water cannon in high pressure mode must be limited to cases of widespread violence that can no longer be contained by targeting specific individuals, and police should never target people who are at close range or unable to move, or direct water cannon jets at peoples’ heads or faces. The use of water cannon in high pressure mode to disperse participants in a peaceful assembly is always disproportionate and unlawful.

<sup>70</sup> <https://x.com/dokuz8haber/status/1905265380391518296?s=46>

<sup>71</sup> <https://vimeo.com/1069714903>, <https://x.com/puleragama/status/1903920945909137779>, <https://vimeo.com/1068979046>, <https://x.com/puleragama/status/1903922796901564885>, <https://x.com/serkanocakkk/status/1903930020034437532>

<sup>72</sup> <https://vimeo.com/1069055189>, <https://x.com/puleragama/status/1903919398986846225>

<https://x.com/evrenselgzt/status/1903934346043466001>, <https://vimeo.com/1069055138>

<sup>73</sup> Telephone interview, 8 April 2025

<sup>74</sup> İzmir Security Directorate Anti-Terrorism Branch interrogation, 25 March 2025.

<sup>75</sup> Telephone interview, 10 April 2025.

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHdxKjFoFvY/?igsh=MXJ5cWFtdHBsMWxibA%3D%3D>

<sup>77</sup> See <https://www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2024/03/Water-cannon-1.pdf?x58675>



Amnesty International further documented the unlawful use of water cannon during the protests held in İzmir on **21, 22 and 26 March**. In two verified YouTube videos broadcast live from the protests held on 21 and 22 March in the area of Bayraklı in İzmir,<sup>78</sup> police officers are observed to be taking a number of repressive actions against protesters, including beating, and using tear gas, pepper spray and water cannon. Video footage recorded near the Folkart building from 21 March shows that police continued to use water cannon even though protesters were largely peaceful. The police were also seen on the video seemingly singling out small groups of protestors and subjecting them to water jets, despite them posing no apparent threat of violence.

Amnesty International has documented that the use of water cannon by law enforcement officials fell far short of international standards – for example when protestors were trapped against a wall with no means to escape – increasing the risk of injuries and only further enflaming tensions. The police used high-pressure jets also against smaller groups of people in protests in İzmir. A video posted on **26 March**,<sup>79</sup> and verified by Amnesty International, shows at least four water cannon vehicles with markings T39, T34, T36 and T28, firing in the direction of a group of approximately ten people who are trying to flee from the Atatürk Avenue towards the Alsancak train station. Afterwards, at least two vehicles start firing water jets in the direction of another group of approximately 20 people, with at least five to ten being stuck against a wall unable to escape the force of the water.

Amnesty International is concerned that the response of law enforcement officials against protesters was, in some cases, wholly unnecessary, and in others, excessive and disproportionate. The use of water cannon by police must be properly regulated in law, pursue a legitimate aim, and not extend beyond what is necessary and proportionate to achieve that aim. Their use should be strictly confined to circumstances in which it is necessary to disperse individuals engaged in violence in the context of a public assembly where the level of violence has reached such a degree that law enforcement officials cannot contain the threat by directly targeting the violent persons only. Analysis of the available video footage from İzmir indicates that protesters did not pose such threat to law enforcement officials. While in some instances, small groups of individuals were seen throwing objects or placing items such as trash bins on the road, these actions appeared to be isolated. Rather than taking steps to identify and isolate those responsible for such conduct, police responded with force against the entire assembly, including individuals who were visibly peaceful and posed no apparent threat. Furthermore, the firing of the jet in high pressure mode towards the upper body and the head of persons as well as the use against protesters who are stuck against a wall unable to escape from the jet is a reckless use of this weapon bearing a high risk of causing excessive harm.<sup>80</sup>

## ANKARA: UNLAWFUL USE OF LESS LETHAL WEAPONS

An 18-year-old Middle East Technical University student N.E.<sup>81</sup> told how, on the first day of the protests on **19 March**, she sustained a fracture on her hand, as the university students were stopped by police on their way from their campus to Kızılay district in Ankara. N.E. was later diagnosed with a ‘boxer’s fracture’ on her right hand after she fell on the ground as the crowd pushed to pass through the police cordon and found herself at the bottom of a pile of people. She described the feeling like she was suffocating and like she was going to die, as she felt the weight of the people on top of her. N.E. reported that she did not realise her hand was broken until her second visit to the hospital two days later, on 21 March when a tomography scan confirmed the injury. N.E. did not have a forensic medical report and had not made a complaint about the officers’ actions that day, because she said, ‘nothing would come out of it.’

Amnesty International also interviewed<sup>82</sup> university student Ö.T. whose foot was crushed by a water cannon vehicle as he was being detained on **23 March** in Kızılay district in Ankara, at the intersection of Atatürk Boulevard with Meşrutiyet Street. He described how police officers dressed all in black and with no identification detained him at around 23:00 and dragged him on the ground when the water cannon drove on his left foot, causing a Lisfranc injury.<sup>83</sup> He screamed in pain and told the officers his foot has been crushed but they allegedly shouted at him saying “what the hell were you doing near the water cannon?” Ö.T. said: “Even though I was in unbearable pain, I was forced to walk to the detention vehicle about 15m away without assistance despite asking for it. One of the officers hit my head several times to the side of the vehicle before I was thrown inside. I fell on the floor of the vehicle. They put me in reverse handcuffs in cable ties. Despite repeatedly telling the officers that my foot had been crushed, they did not believe me, they didn’t call an ambulance or

<sup>78</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDsfci8tbcw&ab\\_channel=AnkaHaberAjans%C4%B1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDsfci8tbcw&ab_channel=AnkaHaberAjans%C4%B1) and [https://www.youtube.com/live/c9olv23NI\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/live/c9olv23NI_Q)

<sup>79</sup> <https://x.com/feroadiguzell/status/1905017060586860626>

<sup>80</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDsfci8tbcw&ab\\_channel=AnkaHaberAjans%C4%B1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDsfci8tbcw&ab_channel=AnkaHaberAjans%C4%B1), [https://www.youtube.com/live/c9olv23NI\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/live/c9olv23NI_Q)

<sup>81</sup> Telephone interview, 9 April 2025

<sup>82</sup> Teams video interview, 3 April 2025

<sup>83</sup> <https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/diseases--conditions/lisfranc-midfoot-injury/>

immediately take me to the hospital. Instead, they made me wait in the detention vehicle for over an hour before I was taken to Gazi Mustafa Kemal hospital, but I did not receive any treatment. The initial CT scan came back at 1:00 showing no fracture. I was taken back to Security Directorate where my foot continued to swell, causing me great pain.” Ö.T. was finally returned to hospital at 6:00 following his repeated requests for medical attention and he was seen by a doctor an hour later at 7:00. Amnesty International examined his medical report confirming the injury which required an emergency operation to prevent gangrene, and hospitalisation. On 15 April 2025, lawyers from the Ankara Bar Association filed a criminal complaint on Ö.T.’s behalf but the outcome was still pending at the time of publication.<sup>84</sup>

Amnesty International also verified two videos showing unlawful use of water cannons in Ankara. In a verified video from **23 March** an individual can be seen running away from two trucks alongside Cemal Gürsel Avenue in Ankara.<sup>85</sup> They appear to be in pursuit, shooting medium-to-high pressurized jets of water, however, the video fails to show any violence in which the use of a water cannon would be justified. In another video, posted on Vimeo on **26 March**, a water cannon is seen to be used against peaceful protesters gathered at Atatürk Avenue, close to the Güvenpark.<sup>86</sup> Water cannons must only be used in instances where there is serious public disorder and for the sole purpose of dispersing crowds engaged in widespread violence. They must not be used against people who are already dispersing, and especially not at a close distance.

## KOCAELİ: UNLAWFUL USE OF FORCE AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS AGAINST STUDENTS

Amnesty International interviewed<sup>87</sup> D.Ş., a 20-year-old student who attended the protest in Kocaeli on **23 March**, arriving at the protest at around 20:30. She described how soon after the speeches at the rally ended, some of the protestors wanted to march and faced up to the police line which she was very close to. There was some pushing from the crowd and the police used pepper spray. D.Ş. managed to get away and went into a takeaway shop. After a while, she came out with the intention of leaving to go back home but was allegedly stopped by people who she later realised were police officers in plain clothes when another officer in uniform arrived. Two officers allegedly grabbed her by the arms and two by the legs, dragging her away, while a fifth male officer was allegedly kicking her on the waist and hip. She was taken for a medical examination before being brought to the police station. She stated that two male police officers were present during the consultation at the hospital in which the doctor asked whether she had any complaints, but she was not examined. D.Ş. was not aware at the time that the consultation with the doctor must be undertaken without police officers present.

### DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS AGAINST DETAINED STUDENTS

On 27 March, the Kocaeli Security Directorate wrote to the Kocaeli University, providing them with the names of 32 students about whom criminal investigations had been initiated under the Law No. 2911, and under the penal code for allegedly ‘damaging public property’ and ‘resisting a public official’.<sup>88</sup> A lawyer who was present during the disciplinary investigation interviews at the University on 5 May told Amnesty International that the students were asked questions including which protests they had participated in, whether they had resisted law enforcement officials and whether they were aware the protests were unlawful. The definition and associated sanctions for students’ actions that may lead to disciplinary investigations are outlined in the Higher Education Institutions Student Disciplinary Regulations<sup>89</sup> which address education related conduct and acts taking place on university premises. Article 10 of the Regulations relates to ‘unforeseen disciplinary offences’ which is overly broad and states that: “Apart from the disciplinary offenses that require suspension and expulsion from the higher education institution, the same type of disciplinary penalties are given to those who commit acts similar in nature and severity to the acts that require warning and reprimand penalties.” The outcome of the disciplinary procedure was pending at the time of publication. Amnesty International has also learned that 18 students in Kocaeli who live in student accommodation had been facing investigations that could result in their expulsion from the halls of residence, after similar letters were sent by the Security Directorate to each of the halls, but that no actual expulsion had taken place at the time of publication.

<sup>84</sup> Ankara Bar Association published a detailed statement about the case on 9 April 2025, announcing that they will make a criminal complaint. <https://ankarabarasu.org.tr/duyuru/e787a7f4-1533-11f0-98ec-000c29c9dfce>

<sup>85</sup> <https://vimeo.com/1069719790>

<sup>86</sup> <https://vimeo.com/1069710654>

<sup>87</sup> Telephone interview, 1 April 2025

<sup>88</sup> Amnesty International examined the letter by the Kocaeli Security Directorate which outlines protests and associated detentions on 20, 21, 23, 24 and 25 March but has not seen the list of names provided to the University.

<sup>89</sup> Yükseköğretim Kurumları Öğrenci Disiplin Yönetmeliği <https://resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2012/08/20120818-12.htm> Articles 4 to 9 of the Regulations detail the infractions and associated administrative punishments.

## RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY IN THE TURKISH CONSTITUTION AND IN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW AND STANDARDS

The exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly is enshrined in Türkiye's Constitution<sup>90</sup> under Article 34, which states that “everyone has the right to hold unarmed and peaceful meetings and demonstration marches without prior permission.” Article 34 of the Constitution stipulates that the freedom of assembly can (only) be restricted “on the grounds of national security, public order, prevention of commission of crime, protection of public health and public morals or the rights and freedoms of others”. Further, Article 3 of the Law on Demonstrations and Public Meetings (Law 2911), states that the organization of peaceful assemblies is not subject to prior authorization.<sup>91</sup>

The right to freedom of peaceful assembly is universally recognized in all major international legal documents and treaties: Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),<sup>92</sup> Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)<sup>93</sup> and Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).<sup>94</sup> An “assembly” is generally understood as a gathering of two or more people for a specific purpose in a public, private or online space (or a combination of these, whether indoors or outdoors). Assemblies can take many different forms (including processions, occupations and encampments) and may also be long-term. They can serve many different purposes (including entertainment, education, culture, sport and commerce). While many assemblies seek to express a message to an external audience, having such an expressive purpose is not a necessary element of an assembly.

As a state party to the ICCPR and the ECHR, Türkiye is duty bound to ensure that the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly is respected and enabled without discrimination. To comply with its obligation, the state has the duty to respect the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to abstain from any interference that infringes on the exercise of the right. Hence, the authorities should not prevent, hinder or restrict people's rights except when it is necessary to do so. Furthermore, the state has the positive duty to take all measures to protect the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly against interference by other individuals or groups and to fulfil the right to freedom of peaceful assembly through the creation of an environment in which people can actually exercise and enjoy the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in practice, in particular to facilitate the exercise of the right in ways that make it possible for participants to achieve their objectives.

The Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly<sup>95</sup> outline states' core obligations such as the presumption in favour of peaceful assemblies; the positive duty to protect and facilitate the right of peaceful assembly including in relation to spontaneous and non-notified assemblies; the imperative that relevant legal provisions in domestic law be in line with international law and the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Furthermore, law enforcement authorities must adopt a human rights-based approach, meaning in particular that they take into account their duty to facilitate and protect peaceful assemblies; they do not use force unless strictly unavoidable, in line with the principles of restraint, proportionality, minimization of damage and preservation of life; and that accountability for the actions of law enforcement personnel is ensured.<sup>96</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Amnesty International's research into the policing of protests that took place across the country in March 2025 in response to the detention and subsequent remanding in pre-trial detention of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu has found clear patterns of police unlawful use of force during and after protests which, at times, may have amounted to torture and other ill-treatment. It is important to note that the protests were overwhelmingly peaceful. The governorates' pre-emptive blanket bans imposed extensive and wide-ranging restrictions which do not pass the three-part test under international human rights law, meaning that they must be provided by law, must be for a legitimate aim, and must be necessary and proportionate to that aim. These bans were manifestly disproportionate and unjustified as they applied to overwhelmingly

<sup>90</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye [https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/media/7258/anayasa\\_eng.pdf](https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/media/7258/anayasa_eng.pdf)

<sup>91</sup> Law on Demonstrations and Public Meetings, 1983, Law 2911, (as amended on 30 July 2003). <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuatmetin/1.5.2911.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-convention>

<sup>95</sup> European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission) OSCE Office For Democratic Institutions And Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) GUIDELINES ON FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY (3rd EDITION), 15 July 2020 [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2019\)017rev-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2019)017rev-e)

<sup>96</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the international human rights law and standards, see Amnesty International: Guidelines on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, November 2024, Index: ACT 30/8426/2024 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/8426/2024/en/>

peaceful mass rallies which proceeded every night for a week. Moreover, the forceful interventions of law enforcement officials following the end of the official CHP rallies were, in some instances, wholly unnecessary and in others, manifestly excessive – recalling, amongst other standards, that state obligations relating to peaceful assemblies extend also to the facilitation of participants leaving an event after it has finished.<sup>97</sup>

In addition, the Istanbul governorate's imposition of broadly framed restrictions on entry and exit into the province constituted a further unwarranted interference with the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of movement under international human rights law.

The testimonies collected by Amnesty International indicate that the warnings by police prior to dispersal consistently fell short of that required by both domestic law and international standards, with insufficient time and space for participants in the protest to leave safely and voluntarily. In fact, the short time given between warning which vast majority of protesters interviewed had not heard, and deployment of force enhanced the likelihood of panic and injury, with several of those interviewed reporting injuries in the ensuing rush to flee.

Analysis of video footage from the same protests echoed the testimony of victims interviewed by Amnesty International, showing police deploying unlawful use of less lethal weapons as well as beatings with hands and batons, kicking and dragging protesters on the ground, causing both pain and injury. Kinetic impact projectiles should not be used at all to disperse peaceful protests, but only in a targeted manner against individuals engaged in serious violence against other persons, when there is no other, less harmful means to address this threat. Yet Amnesty International documented – including in videos analysed by Evidence Lab- police having used them on dozens of occasions against peaceful protesters and in some instances firing at their heads, resulting in injuries to at least seven protestors interviewed by the organization. Police unlawful use of less lethal weapons was furthermore characterized by unjustified and reckless use of tear gas, pepper spray and water cannon. Some of these unlawful acts could amount to torture and other ill-treatment which must be subject to prompt, effective, independent and impartial investigations and law enforcement officials found to have committed human rights abuses must be brought to justice in fair trials.

The police use of reverse handcuffs remains routine, despite the UNCAT recommending Türkiye ban the practice in 2024. All the protesters who were interviewed by Amnesty International were subjected to reverse handcuffs by police when they were detained which they reported were tightly applied in a way that caused pain and were handcuffed for prolonged periods. Troublingly, although detainees right to the highest attainable standard of health and right to be free from torture and other ill-treatment require that medical examinations should be conducted privately and confidentially, without police officers being present, at least three protestors interviewed by Amnesty International specifically mentioned their right to privacy and confidentiality when receiving medical treatment was breached by police officers who remained in the room while their injuries were assessed and tended to by doctors in hospital.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR MUST:

- Refrain from imposing blanket bans on peaceful protests, as they are a disproportionate restriction on the right of peaceful assembly and adopt an enabling approach to the exercise of the right of peaceful assembly rather than preventing and restricting it. Any restriction on the right of peaceful assembly should be based on an individualized assessment of the conduct of participants and the assembly concerned and meet the three-part test i.e. that the restrictions have a legal basis, pursue one or more legitimate aims, and are necessary and proportionate in pursuit of the aim(s);
- Ensure that any use of force by law enforcement officials complies with the fundamental principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, precaution and non-discrimination;
- Ensure that peaceful assemblies are not dispersed. While law enforcement officials may disperse an assembly if it is no longer peaceful (i.e. when violence is manifestly widespread within the assembly), or when there is clear evidence of an imminent threat of serious violence that cannot be reasonably addressed by more proportionate measures such as targeted detentions, as a rule, the authorities should not disperse peaceful assemblies including if the assemblies are considered unlawful under domestic law;
- Ensure that where a decision to disperse meets the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality, that clear warnings to disperse are given by law enforcement officials and that these are audible, with appropriate

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<sup>97</sup> General Comment 37 (2020), para. 33

equivalent means for those with hearing impairments. Participants must also be given sufficient time to disperse. Moreover, any related use of force by law enforcement officials must itself be strictly necessary and proportionate and if force is used, law enforcement officials must exercise restraint and minimize damage and injury;

- Ensure that all law enforcement officials on duty to police assemblies are identifiable with numbers on their uniforms or helmets;
- End the use of kinetic impact projectiles to disperse peaceful protests; ensuring that kinetic impact projectiles are only used against individual persons engaged in serious violence against other persons and only when there are no other less harmful means available to stop the threat;
- Ensure that water cannons are only used under strictly defined circumstances and only when its use is lawful, necessary, and proportionate for the legitimate law enforcement objective to stop widespread serious violence against persons that cannot be addressed through less harmful means, and ensuring adequate dispersal or exit routes be available and never be used in confined spaces or areas where the assembly cannot disperse, warning given to the participants in the assembly before being used, never targeting individuals at short range, and never targeting the head;
- Prohibit the use of tear to disperse peaceful protests and to ensure that tear gas canisters are never aimed at the bodies of protesters.
- Ensure pepper spray is only used against persons resisting violently or being otherwise engaged in violence and only from a safe distance that is preventing excessive harms such as skin burning or impact injury to the eyes.
- Ban the use of restraint techniques that cause unnecessary pain and suffering, in particular the prolonged use and excessive tightening of cable ties and reverse handcuffing;
- Ensure all medical consultations of detained individuals are carried out in line with the Istanbul Protocol, in particular that doctors can examine detained people privately and thoroughly;
- Establish clear guidelines based on international human rights law and standards to protect and facilitate the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly as outlined in Amnesty International's Guidelines on the Right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly as a benchmark to ensure that Türkiye complies with its international human rights obligations and ensure all law enforcement officials responsible for policing assemblies are trained and updated on all relevant aspects;
- Ensure that dispersal is recognized as a measure of last resort in laws and regulations governing assemblies and develop comprehensive guidelines on the (exceptional) dispersal of assemblies in accordance with international human rights law and principles. When it comes to the use of force, guidelines should emphasize the need to avoid the use of force, rather than contemplating force as the only and immediate tactic. Use of force guidelines should be specific and regulate how to avoid the need to resort to the use of force as well as when force may be used and when not. These guidelines should be made public;
- Ensure that all law enforcement officials are subjected to mandatory and comprehensive training in order that assemblies are policed in line with international human rights standards including the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, the United Nations Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement and the Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests. Amnesty International's Guidelines for implementation of the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials can be used as a benchmark to ensure that Türkiye complies with its international human rights obligations;
- Comply with and implement UN Treaty Body recommendations as well as the recommendations of UN Committee Against Torture, regarding the prevention and eradication of torture and other ill-treatment.

#### **THE JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES MUST:**

- Ensure all allegations of unlawful use of force and other human rights violations by law enforcement officials, including threats of sexual and gender-based violence and torture and other ill-treatment inflicted on protesters, are subject to effective, independent, impartial and prompt investigations and that victims are compensated;
- Drop charges immediately and unconditionally against all those protesters who have been charged with criminal offences solely for exercising their right of peaceful assembly.