

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Large-scale demonstrations highlight the need for governmental accountability

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Amnesty International is concerned at the ongoing demonstrations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), initially fuelled by large-scale dismissal of the workforce of industrial companies in the Tuzla Canton, last week.

The demonstrations, now in their second week, reflect the frustration felt by the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who are calling for transparency, accountability, and an end to the dire economic and social conditions and the absence of functioning governments that have long prevailed in the country.

Public gatherings are being organised by people across the whole country demanding change. They have now spread from the Bosnian-Croat Federation to Brčko District and the Republika Srpska (the three entities that make up BiH).

The demonstrations reflect how successive governments have failed to guarantee basic social and economic rights over the almost twenty years following the armed conflict. The entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina now have to face the consequences of their failure to guarantee equal rights and access to basic services for all citizens.

According to the International Labour Organization, unemployment in BiH averages at almost 45 per cent, with youth unemployment running at over 60 per cent.

Although largely peaceful in character, Amnesty International is concerned that some of last week's gatherings saw clashes between demonstrators and the police, and were marred by violence on both sides. Amnesty International calls on both the police and the demonstrators to respect the right to peaceful protest.

Amnesty International had received credible reports of instances where law enforcement officials have allegedly subjected detainees – some of them under the age of 18 – to ill-treatment while in detention. Additionally, at least one journalist was beaten by police officers while recording events in Tuzla.

Amnesty International calls on the relevant authorities to promptly and independently investigate any such allegations, and to bring those responsible to justice. The organization is continuing to monitor the demonstrations and document any further alleged violations and abuses.