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Written statement* submitted by Iranian Elite Research Center, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Police Violence against Protesters in France

Introduction

Human rights organizations and other international bodies have documented and criticized the excessive use of force by police during protests, harming protesters and threatening the right to protest. France adopted a protest law in April 2019 that posed risks to the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. UN experts in February 2019 expressed concern about the law and already disproportionate restrictions on the right to protest in France. French police crowd control and anti-riot tactics, used during demonstrations, injured scores of people during the “Yellow Vests” protests that erupted in late 2018. Those injured included peaceful demonstrators, high-school students, and journalists. There has been widespread criticism of police methods, including by the United Nations and the French ombudsperson.

Ethnic profiling during police checks, affecting Black and Arab youth in particular, continues to be a pervasive problem in France, even though the Constitutional Council (Conseil Constitutionnel), France’s highest constitutional authority, has confirmed that identity checks must be “based exclusively on criteria that exclude discrimination of any kind.” Successive governments have failed to address this widespread, systemic discrimination targeting Black and Arab youth and have allowed this abusive and illegal practice to persist, which deeply harms not only the affected people but also relations between the police and the population[1].

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the disturbing incidents of police violence against protesters in France. The excessive and disproportionate use of force by law enforcement agencies during demonstrations is alarming and runs counter to the principles of human rights, democratic values, and the right to freedom of expression.

In recent times, after an officer, Illegal, unreasonable, and racist behavior, shot and killed a 17-year-old during a traffic stop[2], we have witnessed distressing reports and footage depicting instances where police officers have employed tactics that have resulted in injuries, trauma, and violations of the rights of individuals engaging in protests. [3] In addition, in the meantime, we witnessed that the French president, Macron threatens to cut off social media during protests. [4]

It seems, such actions not only undermine the right to assemble and express dissent but also erode the trust between citizens, the government, and those entrusted with their protection.

Recommendations

We propose the following solutions to address this critical issue:

Accountability and Transparency: Establish an independent oversight body responsible for investigating incidents of police violence. This body should ensure transparency, conduct thorough investigations, and hold accountable those responsible for the excessive use of force.

Training and De-escalation Techniques: Prioritize comprehensive training for law enforcement officers in non-violent conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques. Emphasize the importance of respecting the rights of protesters while maintaining public order.

Dialogue and Communication: Foster open channels of communication between authorities, protesters, and civil society organizations. Establish a platform for constructive dialogue where grievances can be addressed and peaceful solutions can be sought.

Use of Non-Lethal Force: Restrict the use of lethal force in situations where there is an immediate threat to life. Encourage the use of non-lethal methods to disperse crowds and ensure the safety of both protesters and law enforcement personnel.

Community Policing: Promote community policing practices that encourage officers to build positive relationships with the communities they serve. This approach fosters trust and understanding, reducing the likelihood of violent confrontations.

Protection of Journalists and Human Rights Defenders: Safeguard the rights of journalists and human rights defenders to cover and document protests. Ensure their safety and enable them to perform their crucial role in upholding accountability.

Awareness and Education: Implement educational programs to raise awareness among law enforcement personnel about human rights, democratic values, and the significance of peaceful protest as a cornerstone of a democratic society.

Conclusions

We firmly believe that adopting these measures will contribute to creating an environment where peaceful demonstrations can take place without fear of violence or repression.

France must uphold its international commitments to human rights and demonstrate its dedication to fostering a society where the rights and dignity of all individuals, including protesters, are respected and protected.

Call to Action

We respectfully urge the Human Rights Council to address these concerns and engage with the French government to implement these solutions, fostering an environment of dialogue, accountability, and respect for human rights.

[1] https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/country-document/2023-04/HRW_UPR43_FRA_E_Main.pdf

[2] <https://www.dw.com/en/fresh-protests-in-france-against-police-violence/a-66165621>

[3] https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/07/08/fresh-protests-against-police-violence-planned-in-france_6046585_7.html

[4] <https://www.euronews.com/2023/07/05/violent-protests-prompt-french-president-to-consider-suspending-social-media-tools>