



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL: Topic 2

THE ISSUE OF EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE DURING PROTESTS

Background:

Street protests are common means of civic expression which happen all around the world. In the past few years, millions of people have attended street protests worldwide, and have used them as a way to raise pressing issues and to bring about true political, social, or economic change. These protests are usually peaceful and are allowed by the government, as the right to protest is something which most citizens in the world dispose of, but on various occasions, force and brutality have been used in order to suppress these movements. Events ranging from police brutality during the 2020 George Floyd protests to the use of chemical weapons by the military against peaceful protesters in Syria show how this is not just a local issue, but rather a global one which should be internationally discussed in order to reach agreements on how to not infringe basic human rights.

Current Situation:

In the past few years, there have been numerous protests worldwide which have turned violent, both voluntarily and involuntarily. A prime example of this are the George Floyd protests, which took place in 2020. The world is still recovering from the ripple effect caused by those protests and the violence that took place during them, and it is therefore a very hot topic of debate. The police used weapons such as rubber bullets, tear gas, pepper spray, and flashbang grenades, which some argue made the protests even more violent. The protests are still deemed today one of the biggest recent instances of dehumanization and use of unnecessary violence on peaceful protesters in the United States, and will come down in history as grave threats to human rights. In France, on the other hand, the police are relatively peaceful in dealing with the protests, which usually turn violent on their own. French protesters, such as the infamous Yellow Vests, have set cars on fire and vandalized entire cities on countless occasions, and this must be also discussed when talking about violence in protests. A last instance of violence in protests is Syria, where peaceful protesters have been repeatedly violated with the use of chemical weapons on behalf of the government and president Bashar Al-Assad.



Important bloc positions:

Many countries worldwide support peaceful protesting and the basic right to do so, and also condemn any form of violence in these protests, whether it be sparked by the protesters themselves or by law enforcement. Despite this, some of these supporting countries have sometimes employed violence when dealing with protests, and might therefore have a different stance on the matter:

- **France**
On a number of occasions in recent years, French police have used excessive force during assemblies. Under French law a notification regime is applied to peaceful assemblies.
- **Hungary**
The right of peaceful assembly is generally respected in Hungary although recent changes to the Constitution make it easier for the authorities to prohibit protests.
- **Netherlands**
The right of peaceful assembly is widely but not fully respected in The Netherlands. Under domestic law, local authorities have the power to deny assemblies that have not been the subject of prior notification or which may disturb the traffic.
- **Turkey (IMPORTANT)**
The right of peaceful assembly is not generally respected in Turkey.
- **UK**
The right of peaceful assembly is generally protected in the United Kingdom although protests may be forcibly dispersed or protesters settled by the police.

Countries with non-democratic regimes or pseudo-democratic governments are an exception, and may not always be in favor of protesting. They may further use violence to limit such protesting. Such countries may include: DPRK, China, Turkey, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Belarus, et cetera.



Possible solutions:

- **Limiting police intervention in peaceful protests.**
Oftentimes, it is police involvement itself which sparks violence in protests, and acts of violence employed by armed forces, such as shooting rubber bullets, may be counteracted by further violence and may lead to irreversible escalations of rioting and brutality.
- **Strengthen police-community relationship and communication.**
Having a good relationship with law enforcement can oftentimes prevent tensions from rising between the two fractions.
- **Address social, economic, and political marginalization of the youth.**
Most protests are organized and attended by people of a young age who feel under or even misrepresented by their government or nation. Violent protests may spark because of total neglect on behalf of the government, and the latter could then lead to the police being forced to employ violence in order to maintain public order and safety. If some of the youth's demands were to be met before hand, many violent protests could turn into peaceful ones.
- **Limit the use of dispersion weapons.**
Set new guidelines on using smoke bombs, rubber bullets, et cetera to prevent public distress and counter attacks from protesters.

Further reading:

- [Worldwide protest tracker](#)

Bibliography:

- 1) "Use of force in the policing of demonstrations - European Court of" 6 Oct. 2020, https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Force_demonstrations_ENG.pdf. Accessed 6 Nov. 2021.
- 2) "Police must end use of excessive force against protesters and high" 14 Dec. 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2018/12/police-must-end-use-of-excessive-force-against-protesters-and-high-school-children-in-france/>. Accessed 6 Nov. 2021.