

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL  
PRESS RELEASE**

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**Iraq: Eyewitness describes 'street filled with blood' as at least 25 protesters killed in security force onslaught**

A range of different security forces descended on protesters in the Iraqi city of Nasiriyah overnight, killing at least 25 people and injuring scores more by this morning, Amnesty International confirmed after interviewing eyewitnesses and verifying a dozen videos and images from the scene.

The organization urged Iraqi authorities to rein in security forces, amid reports of ongoing use of live ammunition against protesters in Nasiriyah on Thursday afternoon.

Amnesty International's Digital Verification Corps verified footage showing troops charging as they fired at protesters from what sound like automatic weapons near the city's al-Zaitoon bridge. Multiple other verified videos show protesters running from gunfire, or screaming in fear or anguish, and tending to those killed or wounded in the violence.

"The scenes from Nasiriyah this morning more closely resemble a warzone than city streets and bridges. This brutal onslaught is just the latest in a long series of deadly events where Iraqi security forces meted out appalling violence against largely peaceful protesters," said Lynn Maalouf, Middle East Research Director at Amnesty International.

"With well over 300 protesters now dead across Iraq since 1 October, and thousands more injured or arrested, this bloodbath must stop now. The international community must speak loudly and clearly, pressing for Iraq to rein in the security forces and launch effective and impartial investigations aimed at bringing to justice those responsible for unlawful killings and other serious violations."

At least 25 people were killed and scores injured in the overnight violence in Nasiriyah, according to a credible source who spoke to Amnesty International on condition of anonymity.

An eyewitness told the organization that protesters had been demonstrating peacefully in the areas around al-Nasr and al-Zaitoon bridges when, around 3am local time, members of the SWAT, anti-riot and other forces turned up near the bridges with a bulldozer to break through the protesters' barricade. He described the violence that ensued:

"They opened fire non-stop. They retook the bridge within five minutes... because they would not stop firing and people were running away. I saw at least five people die in front of me. Anyone who was shot and killed was left behind because the forces beat anyone they caught. I saw them beat people like they wanted to kill them. It was a catastrophe.

"We ran towards houses to hide inside. The forces said on the speakers that if anyone is hiding in the house they should get out or they would start shooting at the houses. We had to come out. They were still shooting. They ended up herding and chasing the remaining protesters towards al-Habboobi Square which is the traditional place for the protests. It felt like the entire city had come out to protect the protesters: men, women and children. They

were all out. The shooting was continuous until 7am. More people died near an area called Tarbiya close to al-Habboobi."

The man said that local residents, angered by the violence, threw stones at security forces and set fire to the local headquarters of the Federal Police Emergency Response.

Another eyewitness said he headed down to the area near the bridges shortly after 3am to live-stream the protests. He too described a range of security forces deploying and firing large amounts of tear gas and live ammunition, apparently to kill rather than disperse protesters. He said:

"They were shooting straight at the protesters but also at the ground. People were being shot in their chest and necks. Most injuries are from the head, chest, neck... there is news that there were snipers. It is like an execution, direct shooting at the head... We were responding to the injuries and the deaths, the street was filled with blood."

Local residents told Amnesty International that protesters had been gathered in the al-Nasr and al-Zaitoon bridges area since last weekend. On 23 November anti-riot police shot at the protesters, killing two and injuring 15. But since then the situation was largely calm up until this morning.

"This pattern has become all too familiar across Iraq, where security forces unlawfully kill and injure protesters, and deploy a range of other insidious methods to intimidate and arrest those involved or believed to be helping," said Lynn Maalouf.

"These are serious violations of the human rights to life, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, and the Iraqi authorities must change course immediately."

According to the NGO Netblocks, [internet connectivity in Nasiriyah dropped significantly](#) around 5:30am, coinciding with the violent crackdown.

## **Background**

On 1 October 2019, two weeks of nationwide protests over unemployment, corruption and poor public services broke out in Iraq. The protests resumed on the night of 24 October in Baghdad and other provinces including Karbala, Basra, Babel and Diwaniya. From the outset of the protests, Amnesty International documented the [excessive, and in dozens of cases, lethal use of force](#) by security forces to disperse protesters, including with [military-grade tear gas grenades](#), [live ammunition](#) and [deadly sniper attacks](#). The organization has also documented a [relentless campaign of intimidation and assault](#) against activists in Baghdad, including enforced disappearances. Most recently, the organization documented the [destruction of medical equipment and tents](#) in Baghdad as security forces charged into several bridges and streets near Tahrir square in an attempt to clear protesters from the area. Amnesty International continues to receive reports of excessive force used to disperse protesters and new cases of arrest and intimidation of protesters.

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