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ITUC call: Killings should stop immediately in Yemen

Brussels, 18 March 2011 (ITUC OnLine): At least 30 people have been killed and hundreds wounded after Yemeni security forces opened fire today on protesters at University Square, in the capital Sanaa.

The security forces were trying to prevent protesters from marching out of the square where they were gathered. Many protesters were shot in the head and neck; most of the injured were shot with live ammunition. According to medical sources, the death toll is likely to rise.

According to witnesses, pro-regime thugs also opened fire on protesters from houses close to University Square.

Friday's attack came as tens of thousands gathered across the country, continuing to demand that president Ali Abdullah Saleh - the country's ruler of 32 years - step down.

Anti-government demonstrations were also held in other cities including Taiz, Ibb, Hodeidah, Aden, and Amran following Muslim midday prayers on Friday.

Ahead of the protests, hundreds of police patrolled the streets of Sanaa and elite forces set up fortifications around the presidential compound, ministries and the headquarters of Yemen's ruling party.

Government forces have previously used live fire, rubber bullets, and tear gas on anti-regime rallies, in the government's increasingly violent crackdown on protests, which has already let to 70 deaths and hundreds of wounded.

While economic conditions for average Yemenis are dire and worsening, a generation of young activists, among them many young women, have been leading the civil society movement for democratic changes.

“The Yemeni authorities must stop the bloodshed immediately and set a genuine national dialogue to respond to the legitimate demands of the people for democracy and equity. The ITUC urges also the international community to promote national dialogue, prioritise aid for socio-economic purposes and supporting democracy, and ensure that any security assistance cannot be used against peaceful protesters through the country”, said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow.

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 305 affiliated national organisations from 151 countries and territories. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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