

Yemen: Protester Killings Show Perils of Impunity Deal Human Rights Watch 20
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Yemeni security forces used excessive force when they opened fire on anti-government protesters in Sanaa on September 18, 2011, and in Taizz on September 19, killing at least 27 and wounding hundreds, Human Rights Watch said today. Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that security forces in Sanaa first sprayed demonstrators with sewage, and then, after protesters responded by throwing rocks, fired directly on them without warning, using rocket-propelled grenades as well as assault rifles and heavy machine guns.

The attacks began six days after President Ali Abdullah Saleh authorized his vice president to resume negotiations on a Gulf Cooperation Council-brokered accord, backed by the United States and the European Union, under which the president would resign in exchange for immunity from prosecution for any crime. (...)

“These latest killings by Yemeni security forces show exactly why there should be no get-out-of-jail-free card for those responsible,” said [Joe Stork](#), deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. “The Gulf Cooperation Council and other governments involved in negotiating President Saleh’s exit cannot grant immunity for international crimes.”

Human Rights Watch said the attacks were clearly disproportionate to any threat to the lives of security personnel or others from protesters throwing rocks. Witnesses said the security forces carried shields and wore protective gear including helmets, and that protesters were not carrying, let alone using, firearms. (...)

Yemen has objected to proposals that the High Commissioner establish an office in Sanaa. The recent attacks again demonstrated the urgency of the human rights situation in Yemen and the need for such a presence, Human Rights Watch said. The Netherlands is expected to put forward a resolution on Yemen at the Council at the end of this week. (...)

Systematic or widespread unlawful killings, carried out as a state policy, constitute crimes against humanity. International law rejects impunity for serious human rights crimes, such as crimes against humanity, Human Rights Watch said. International treaties require states parties to ensure that alleged perpetrators of serious crimes are prosecuted, including those who give the orders for these crimes, or are in a position of authority and fail to prevent the crimes. (...)

In addition to ensuring there is no immunity for international crimes, Human Rights Watch said, foreign governments should freeze the assets of Saleh and top security officials, and formally suspend all security aid and weapons sales to Yemen until authorities stop these attacks, conduct impartial investigations into those responsible, and hold them to account. Foreign governments also should call on the UN Security Council to urgently address the Yemen crisis, as well as support the push for a human rights monitoring office in Yemen.

“This week’s events at the UN General Assembly shouldn’t distract from the human tragedy unfolding in Yemen,” said Stork. “The UN Security Council call on August 9 for maximum

restraint in Yemen has been ignored, so now it should act to ensure Saleh's government ends these abuses." (...) Read the full [press release](#) .