

# **Police, protester standoff in Hong Kong's Central; 72 injured in clashes as rights groups condemn use of tear gas**

Thursday 13 June 2019, by [CREERY Jennifer](#) (Date first published: 13 June 2019).

Police and anti-extradition law protesters continued a tense standoff into the night on Wednesday after a day of grisly clashes left 72 injured. Two are in a serious condition.

The protesters' road occupation around government headquarters ended in violence after the police deployed tear gas and rubber bullets as demonstrators lurched forward.

Pushed westwards, the crowd have since formed a blockade on Harcourt Road using materials taken from a construction site, holding an area in Central near the cenotaph and Mandarin Oriental.

The Hospital Authority said that as of 10pm on Wednesday 72 people were injured in the afternoon's clashes – two of whom are in a serious condition, 19 are stable or satisfactory, whilst 10 are in an unknown condition and 41 have been discharged.

Of those included, 50 are men and 22 are women aged between 15 and 66 years old.

Hong Kong proposed legal amendments in February to allow the city to handle case-by-case extradition requests from jurisdictions with no prior agreements – most notably China and Taiwan. The bill would enable the chief executive and local courts to handle extradition requests without legislative oversight, though lawyers, journalists, foreign politicians and businesses have raised concerns over the risk of residents being extradited to the mainland, which lacks human rights protections. A scheduled Legislative Council debate of the bill was postponed due to the protests on Wednesday.

## **'Severe bodily harm'**

The Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF), who organised one of the city's largest-ever protest on Sunday in opposition to the extradition bill, condemned the "significantly excessive" use of force against protesters.

They said that, on two occasions, police officers repeatedly beat participants with batons after restraining them and – in one instance – fired a tear gas canister within 15 metres of demonstrators.

"We believe this use of force to be significantly excessive, and goes beyond the purpose of dispersing or arresting demonstrators. The behaviour of the police officers may be subject to criminal liability, including inflicting grievous bodily harm," their statement read.

CHRF added that the unprecedented use of rubber bullets and bean bags to dispel protesters was a gross violation of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

"The level of force of these weapons and the extent of the police's use of these weapons are out of

proportion and not commensurate with the purpose of dispersing demonstrators,” they said.

Man-kei Tam, director of Amnesty International Hong Kong, also decried the use of force against protesters: “The ugly scenes of police using tear gas and pepper spray against overwhelmingly peaceful protesters is a violation of international law,” he said. “Police have a duty to maintain public order, but in doing so they may use force only when strictly necessary.”

“Tear gas and projectiles like rubber bullets are notoriously inaccurate and indiscriminate and can result in serious injury and even death. They should only ever be used in a targeted response to specific acts of violence and never to disperse peaceful protesters,” Tam added.

The Hong Kong Journalists Association issued a statement condemning the police of forcing journalists with shields and batons “causing injury to several” while “targeting retreating reporters with pepper spray, causing burns on their backs and hands.”

The city’s Police Chief Stephen Lo defended the use of such measures saying it was a necessary response to the “riot.”

While in a televised response to the clashes, Chief Executive Carrie Lam “strongly condemned” the use of lethal methods to attack police such as creating fires, using metal bars as weapons and damaging public facilities.

But UK-based NGO Human Rights Watch dismissed the characterisation of Wednesday’s events as a “riot” saying it should not provide the police license to commit violent acts with impunity.

“The Hong Kong government should immediately drop the proposed extradition legislation in view of the clear opposition of Hong Kong’s population and the severe disquiet expressed by the international community,” their statement read.

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