

Berlin police say use of force is part of legal system in Germany



FILE PHOTO: Police officers scuffle with a demonstrator during a protest in Berlin, Germany, on August 1, 2021. © Reuters / Christian Mang

Berlin, August 10 (RHC)-- In spite of video evidence online, police in Berlin, Germany, have rejected the criticism by the United Nations special rapporteur on torture of their heavy-handed response to anti-lockdown rallies that saw hundreds arrested.

The protesters recently gathered in unauthorized demonstrations against the government's COVID-19 measures, in contravention of the restrictions on such gatherings under the Infection Protection Act. They heeded no warnings and attacked officers, the Berlin police said in a statement on Monday, warranting their "violent" enforcement measures.

The statement was issued in response to the views expressed in the media last week by Nils Melzer, the UN special rapporteur on torture. Melzer had said he would be requesting an official statement from the government on police actions during the massive anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination rally in early August.

"There have been some videos that are worrying," Melzer told the DPA news agency. "The evidence is strong enough [to suspect] that human rights violations may have been committed." He requested some additional information about one video that surfaced on social media showing a police officer brutally grabbing an elderly woman by the neck and throwing her to the ground. "She could have died," Melzer said.

However, the Berlin police apparently believed there was nothing extraordinary about the footage that drew the attention of the UN official, and have stated that "violence" was virtually a part of their mandate.

"Direct enforcement is violence. Violence harms. Violence hurts. Violence looks violent," a Berlin police spokesperson, Thilo Cablitz, told the DPA news agency. "Direct enforcement is still a part of our legal system, even with all those images," he added, referring to the videos of police brutality that were shared on social networks and via various media outlets.

The police also addressed the specific case involving the elderly woman that had sparked Melzer's concern. Claiming the officer who threw the woman to the ground acted professionally, the spokesperson said he had held her by the back right until she hit the ground "to avoid head injuries," according to a statement quoted by the Tagesspiegel daily.

The anti-lockdown protest in Berlin on August 1 became chaotic when police tried to forcefully disperse the crowds. Some 5,000 people took part and around 600 were arrested.

Footage shared on the internet showed many instances of police violence, including officers kicking and shoving protesters, punching their faces, pepper-spraying them, and grabbing them and throwing them to the ground.

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