



June 3, 2020

Senator Lindsey Graham
Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee

Senator Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee

Dear Chair Graham and Ranking Member Feinstein:

Amnesty International USA calls on the Senate Judiciary Committee to urgently investigate the role of Attorney General William Barr in the lawless and abusive crackdown on Black Lives Matter protesters this week in Washington, D.C. We are horrified that the orders to recklessly and unjustifiably deploy tear gas and rubber bullets against peaceful protesters reportedly came directly from Attorney General Barr, ostensibly at the behest of President Trump. If left unchecked, this abuse of power at the very highest levels of the U.S. government will send a chilling signal to authorities across the nation that they can continue to unleash brutal, unwarranted force against protesters.

Amnesty International is the world's largest grassroots human rights movement, comprising a support base of millions of individual members, supporters, and activists in more than 150 countries and territories. Amnesty has fought for decades to protect the right to protest: from the historic uprising in Tahrir Square in 2011 to the roar of protests across Latin America and the Caribbean in 2019. In 2014, a team of Amnesty researchers monitored protests challenging police killings of Black people in Ferguson, Missouri – a precursor to today's protests.

The standards governing dispersal of public protests are clear: enforced dispersal should only take place as a measure of last resort, when violence occurs or there is an imminent threat of violence. The type of equipment used to disperse an assembly must be carefully considered and used only when necessary, proportionate, and lawful. Policing and security equipment – including so-called “less lethal” weapons such as rubber bullets and tear gas – can result in serious injury, even death. Toxic chemical irritants, such as tear gas, should never be fired directly at people, used in confined spaces against unarmed people, or in situations where exits and ventilation points are restricted.

Here, security forces' reckless and unjustified firing of tear gas and rubber bullets against peaceful protesters flagrantly violated these standards. According to the *Washington Post*, Attorney General Barr personally ordered this violent crackdown on protesters in what appears to have been an appalling abuse of authority. We urge the Committee to immediately condemn Attorney General Barr's actions and launch an inquiry into his involvement in the unlawful crackdown down on peaceful protest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Lin".

Joanne Lin
National Director, Advocacy & Government Relations
Amnesty International USA