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Russia Day Detentions 'Arbitrary and Abusive,' Says Human Rights Watch

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Riot police detain a demonstrator during an anti-corruption protest in central St. Petersburg, Russia, June 12, 2017. **Anton Vaganov / Reuters**

Russian riot police used excessive force against hundreds of demonstrators during anti-corruption protests on June 12, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said Friday.

The human rights group interviewed 13 protesters and described conditions under which they were detained and held during Russia Day demonstrations in Moscow and St. Petersburg as "abusive."

According to HRW, riot police used "excessive force against protesters."

"If protesters questioned their detentions or refused to go willingly, the police handled them roughly and in some cases dragged them on the ground, beat them with truncheons, kicked them with booted feet, and punched them," the HRW brief said.

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“The mass detentions on June 12 were arbitrary and abusive. People have a right to free assembly, authorized or not,” Tanya Lokshina, Russia program director at Human Rights Watch, said.

Police detained 866 people in Moscow and 658 people in St. Petersburg, HRW said. More than 130 children were arrested in Moscow and about 65 in St. Petersburg.

Those who had been detained told Human Rights Watch they received fines between 3,000 and 15,000 rubles ($30 to $250). Some received sentences of up to 15 days.

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