

Rights abuses alleged in Georgian capital

by UPI

TBILISI, Georgia -- Excessive force was used on protesters in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi by government forces last month, Human Rights Watch claimed Thursday. "Our research clearly shows that the Georgian government crossed the line when police chased and beat peaceful demonstrators and threatened and intimidated journalists," said Holly Cartner, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "The Nov. 7 police operations were not legitimate means of policing. They have done serious damage to Georgia's reputation as a champion of human rights." Part of the clampdown was a raid on the private Imedi television station, which is partly owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, the report said. Hundreds of police threatened Imedi staff before ejecting them and then destroying the station's equipment, the 102-page Human Rights Watch report claimed. At a peaceful demonstration in front of the parliament buildings, witnesses told the rights group masked riot police opened fire with rubber bullets, water cannons and tear gas and then pursued the fleeing demonstrators, kicking, punching and beating them. To diffuse the tensions the next day, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili called early presidential elections for Jan. 5.

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