The United Nations has said that it is “very concerned” over widespread violence, and allegations of unnecessary or disproportionate use of force by police during protests in Kenya.

Protests against the government’s tax hike broke out across Kenya on Wednesday, July 12.

According to reports, up to 23 people were killed during clashes with police. In videos, fires are seen burning near Nairobi’s outer ring road.

The UN Human Rights Office spokesperson Jeremy Laurance said in a press release on Friday, “We call for prompt, thorough, independent and transparent investigations into the deaths and injuries. Those responsible must be held to account. Effective measures to prevent further deaths and injuries must be adopted.

Laurence called on the authorities to ensure the right to peaceful assembly as guaranteed by the Kenyan Constitution and international human rights law.”

“The policing of protests must seek to facilitate peaceful assemblies, and any use of force must be guided by the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination. Firearms should never be used to disperse protests.

We appeal for calm and encourage open dialogue to address social, economic and political grievances, with the aim of identifying lasting solutions in the interests of all Kenyans.” He said.

In the meantime, the legality of the increased taxes the government has collected since July 1, as envisaged in the Act, is increasingly contested.

On June 30, a day before the Act took effect, the High Court temporarily suspended its implementation. This was because the procedural requirements for passing a finance bill through the parliament were not met.

Subsequently, on July 10, the High Court refused the government’s appeal to lift the temporary suspension, extending it indefinitely.

However, the June 30 verdict did not stop the government from doubling the VAT on fuel on July 1 from 8% to 16%. This was a measure the IMF had pressed Kenya to implement at least since 2021.

Fuel prices in Kenya had already reached a historic high after Ruto’s government lifted subsidies at the IMF’s insistence. With the doubling of VAT, taxes now amount to 40% of the cost per liter, which has reached a 12-year high.