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Ugandan police beat protesters at summit

By George Parker and Michael Holman in Kampala

Human rights demonstrators were on Friday beaten by Ugandan police in Kampala, during a Commonwealth summit dominated by talk of upholding civil liberties and democracy.

Some demonstrators were carried away with head wounds, after more than 100 police blocked a march on Kampala city centre and charged with batons. Witnesses said one police officer also suffered a head injury.

The quelling of the protests against Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni is an embarrassment for the 53-country Commonwealth, which on Thursday suspended Pakistan for curtailing civil rights.

“This is nothing new. This is what we have been living through all this time,” said Kizza Besigye, an opposition leader. He says the country’s elections are not fair.

David Miliband, Britain’s foreign minister, promised to raise concerns about Uganda’s human rights in Kampala, but governments ignored opposition calls for a summit boycott.

Meanwhile, a senior Commonwealth minister on Friday urged Gordon Brown, British prime minister, to reconsider his decision to boycott next month’s EU-Africa summit should Zimbabwe’s president, Robert Mugabe, attend.

Ojo Maduekwe, Nigeria’s foreign minister, said on the first day of the summit: “We will miss the British in Lisbon – we wish the British prime minister was there.”

President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa is expected to brief Commonwealth leaders on progress towards free elections in Zimbabwe.

Mr Mbeki stopped at Harare, the Zimbabwean capital, en route to the summit for talks with Mr Mugabe and with the main opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai.

Diplomats said he believed the talks had been positive, but many were sceptical. Other items on the summit agenda include world trade and global warming.

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