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Cyprus: Police brutality must not go unpunished

Amnesty International calls on the Cypriot authorities to end impunity for police ill-treatment and to ensure that all complaints of police brutality are promptly, thoroughly, impartially and independently investigated and that those responsible are duly punished.

In a letter to the Minister of Justice and Public Order, Doros Theodorou, Amnesty International raises a number of concerns regarding a case involving a number of police officers that is under criminal investigation at the moment.

In the early morning hours of 20 December 2005, Marcos Papageorgiou and Yiannos Nicolaou, both aged 27, were arrested and beaten by plain-clothes policemen in Nicosia. Initially, Marcos Papageorgiou refused to obey a search order by two men, one of whom declared himself to be a police officer, because he was not allowed to examine his police credentials. It is alleged that the police officers had suspected the two men of drug dealing. Amnesty International has had access to a 10-minute video sequence shot by a private individual who witnessed part of the beating.

"It is an absolute disgrace that police officers can behave in such a violent way towards handcuffed and helpless men. The images on the video, including where officers are shown to be slamming Marcos Papageorgiou's head onto the pavement several times while he is lying on the ground and with his hands cuffed behind his back, are appalling" Olga Demetriou, Amnesty International's researcher on Cyprus, said.

"These images of police brutality constitute a clear violation of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment."

Following the complaints by Marcos Papageorgiou and Yiannos Nicolaou about their ill-treatment by police officers, an internal investigation was opened by the police department. A few days later, a criminal investigation was also opened at which point the internal police investigation was discontinued. However, the two men were served notices in March, informing them that the five police officers, shown in the video to be beating them, were suing them for assault and requesting damages. Amnesty International understands that these notices were authorized on the basis of the internal police investigation having been concluded and having cleared the officers involved of any wrongdoing.

The organization is concerned about reports that:

- The police officers did not let the men examine properly their identification;

- The men were detained for an hour before they were allowed to phone their parents and lawyer;

The internal police investigation into the case was not thorough and impartial;
Following the complaints and throughout the internal and criminal investigation periods, the suspected police officers have not been suspended from active duties.

"This case has opened up the Pandora's Box. After publication of the video images of the treatment of the two young men, many people reporting incidents of ill-treatment by police officers are coming forward. Many of them claim to have been threatened with counter-charges of assaulting the police if complaints were filed," Olga Demetriou said.

Public Document

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