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GREEK AUTHORITIES MUST SEND A STRONG MESSAGE AGAINST CASES OF POLICE ABUSE

A series of serious allegations including torture against detainees including members of vulnerable groups, excessive use of chemical irritants and other ill-treatment against protesters that came to light in the last month have raised Amnesty International's profound concerns.

The organization is also profoundly concerned over the dramatic increase of racially motivated attacks against migrants, asylum-seekers and other foreign nationals and of cases where the police reportedly discourages or intimidates the victims from reporting such attacks.

Amnesty International urges the Greek authorities to send a strong message that condemns police abuse against protesters and detainees. Any allegations of police abuse and other misconduct should be thoroughly, promptly and impartially investigated and it must be ensured that the perpetrators are going to be brought to justice.

The organization also calls the Greek authorities to send a strong message condemning racially motivated attacks and explicitly deterring police officers from committing such attacks. Any allegations of police deterring victims of racially motivated attacks and other hate crime from reporting them must be thoroughly investigated.

Allegations of ill-treatment during arrest and/or detention

In October 2012, serious allegations of torture and other ill-treatment by fifteen anti-fascist protesters during their arrest by police and their detention at the Attika General Police Directorate (GADA) on 30 September 2012 came to light. The allegations included use of taser gun against one of the protesters during arrest, spits, sexually abusive comments against female protesters, verbal abuse, beatings, threats and denial of access to a doctor and legal assistance.

In addition, twenty five other individuals who gathered outside the courts in Athens, and who were subsequently arrested and transferred to the same Directorate on 1 October 2012, made allegations of being tortured by police officers while in detention. The protesters of the second group alleged that they were ordered to strip naked and made to bend before police officers, slapped and hit. The allegations received wide publicity on national and international media.

X., one of the fifteen protesters spoke to Amnesty International and said that while detained in GADA, the arrested protesters were subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment. X. said that police officers physically abused many of the arrested protesters including those who were injured, by slapping them, spitting at them and that cigarette lighters were used to burn them. X. also said that the police threatened to reveal the names of the protesters to the far right party Golden Dawn and that they made sexually abusive comments to the female protesters who were arrested. He described how the police deprived them of sleep and refused to provide them with water for several hours. X. also said that the detention conditions were inadequate and included detention in a very small cell along with other individuals, appalling hygiene conditions and having to sleep on the cell's floor.

According to Haris Ladis, one of the lawyers, representing the protesters, the police did not allow 15 protesters contact with their lawyers for fifteen hours.

The spokesman of the Greek Police denied that the incident took place and the allegations were also questioned by Nikolaos Dendias, the Minister of Public Order and Citizens' Protection.

Amnesty International has also received and viewed a copy of the findings of the state pathologists' reports who examined eight of the arrested protesters. The findings confirmed cuts and bruises on various parts of their bodies including head, hands legs, back and shoulders. The injuries were found to be caused by a sharp and bendy instrument and in one case also by a sharp instrument. In addition one of the protesters was found to have sustained a serious bodily injury including a fracture in his right hand, an injury on his knee, bruises on the right side of his face, extensive bruising on the side where the right kidney is and extensive haematoma on the right thigh.

Furthermore, the organization received reports that on 4 October 2012, riot police used excessive force against a crowd of more than 100 supporters of the arrested protesters who were standing outside a building of the Athens First Instance Courts where the anti-fascists protesters were brought for interrogation. The use of force was described as unprovoked and included beatings with batons and kicks. An Amnesty International member who was present described how he was hit by a police officer's baton on his back while he was trying to escape and saw at least three more individuals including two women with head injuries.

Allegations of ill-treatment of individuals belonging to vulnerable groups

Amnesty International has also received reports from representatives of the Movement Against Racism and Fascist Threat, that thirteen migrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh held under immigration powers at the Pireus police station alleged that on 21 October 2012, a police officer serving at the station took three of the detainees outside the cell, ordered another detainee to beat them and also beat them himself. The police officer also allegedly punched a detainee who protested over the abuse. The detainees reported that the police officer had abused them between seven to eight times in a period of eleven days. The detainees also alleged that they were racially abused by the police officer. As a result, they went on hunger strike on 22 October 2012.

Amnesty International understands that following the allegations, the Internal Affairs Directorate of the Greek Police started a criminal investigation.

Allegations of ill-treatment by police guards have also been received in recent weeks by some individuals held for immigration purposes at the Komotini police academy used since August 2012 as an immigration detention facility.

In addition, a press release by AITIMA in September 2012, a non-governmental organization (NGO) working with asylum-seekers, stated that delegates visiting the army camp in Korinth received reports of violent and degrading treatment of detainees by police guards to representatives of the NGO who visited the camp last month. It is to be noted that the AITIMA delegates were not allowed access to the camp but were only able to speak to three asylum-seekers. Similar allegations were also received by a delegation of the SYRIZA party that visited the camp last week and were made public in the national press.

Allegations of excessive use of force including chemical irritants

On 21 October 2012 riot police reportedly made excessive use of chemicals and chased and beat protesters of all ages gathered peacefully outside the area where gold mining operations are planned at mountain Kakavos in Halkidiki (northern Greece).

According to testimonies received, police threw chemical irritants inside protesters' cars as they tried to flee. Ms R. Ververidou, a 63-year old female protester told Amnesty International how a riot police officer dragged her out of the car that her husband was driving, made her kneel and keep her head down and trampled on her left ankle with his boot causing a nerve

injury in her leg. Katerina Iglessi, an MP with the SYRIZA party, participating in the protest also told the organization that she was verbally assaulted and attacked by a plain clothes police officer when asking to enter the Polygyros police station where 14 of the protesters were transferred and questioned.

In an announcement issued by the Ministry of Public Order and Citizens' Protection, it was stated amongst others that the protesters were not peaceful and that eight police officers were injured.

Failure to protect victims of racist and other type of attacks

In an incident that occurred in the early hours of 26 September 2012, members of far right groups vandalized the Tanzanian community offices that are situated in the neighbourhood of Kypseli in Athens and a nearby shop owned by a third-country national. Ioanna Kurtovik, a lawyer representing the community and the shop owner, reported to Amnesty International that when the victims went to the police station of Aghios Panteleimon to file criminal complaints after they identified some of the perpetrators, the police arrested and held the shop owner for falsely accusing the individual he identified as one of the perpetrators and following threats regarding the lawsuit against him, the former withdrew the charges. Furthermore, the lawyer was verbally assaulted and was thrown eggs outside the police station where residents of the area and members of the far-right party Golden Dawn were gathered in support of the individuals arrested for the attacks.

It is to be noted that on 23 October 2012, the Racist Violence Recording Network presented extremely worrying findings that resulted from the recording of incidents of racially motivated violence for the period of January to September 2012. The Network was set up at the initiative of the National Commission for Human Rights and the UN Refugee Agency, and apart from the above, numbers 23 non-governmental organizations and bodies including Amnesty International. According to the Network's findings more than half of the 87 recorded incidents are connected with extremists groups that acted in an organized and planned manner while in certain cases, the victims or witnesses reported that they recognized amongst the perpetrators individuals associated with Golden Dawn. Furthermore, according to the findings "one of the main problems rests with the inability or unwillingness of the criminal investigation authorities to record racist violence incidents, to investigate the cases thoroughly and to arrest the perpetrators or, at times, with the practice of deterring the victims of the attacks who do not have legal residence papers from reporting racist violence incidents to the police".

In addition, the organization is seriously concerned over the testimony of a journalist reproduced in the national media that he was assaulted and verbally abused by members of Golden Dawn including one MP on 11 October 2012 outside the Chytyrio theatre in Athens. The journalist reported that police stood by and did not assist him despite his requests. Members of extreme Christian groups and the far-right party Golden Dawn including some of the party's MPs protested against and tried to stop the premiere of the play *Corpus Christi* by verbally abusing and threatening the actors and those who went to see the play.

Furthermore, during the episodes Christos Pappas, another Golden Dawn MP released from a police van a protester that was arrested. A video shows that the MP was not prevented by the police that was present. Amnesty International understands that the Greek police filed a criminal complaint against the MP and that Antonis Roupakiotis, the Minister of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights requested from the Supreme Court Prosecutor to investigate the possibility of whether action should be brought against the police officers who did not stop the MP from releasing the arrested protester.

Arbitrary transfers to police stations

Finally, a member of the Board of the Greek section of Amnesty International who is also a recognized refugee reported that he was stopped and searched in the evening of 11 October 2012 at Mesogheion street in Athens by four police officers driving two motorbikes. At the time, he was at work as a mentor for volunteers for a non-governmental organization and was

assisting a volunteer to go to a hotel. The Board member reported that during the stop and search, one police officer subjected him to degrading remarks while he was handcuffed and not allowed to call his work. He was subsequently transferred to a police station without having committed any offence and subsequently released.

Background

Amnesty International has longstanding concerns regarding human rights violations by law enforcement officials in Greece. They include frequent allegations of excessive use of force and other human rights violations in the policing of demonstrations. Other frequent allegations refer to ill-treatment during arrest and/or detention including against members of vulnerable groups.

A report published in July 2012 documented such violations and concluded that the authorities fail to acknowledge the extent of this systemic problem. The report also found that police and judicial authorities frequently fail to conduct prompt and thorough investigations, and victims are unwilling to report abuses owing to a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system. The report made a series of recommendations including ensuring that police exercise restraint and identify themselves clearly during demonstrations and creating a truly independent and effective police complaints mechanism.

For further documents on Amnesty International's concerns on police violence in Greece see:

"Attacks against journalists during protests have a detrimental effect against freedom of expression", Public statement, 1 May 2012, AI Index: EUR 25/003/2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR25/003/2012/en/4ddfb2a2-9af7-4278-810b-c3a360381494/eur250032012en.html>

Police Violence in Greece: Not just "isolated incidents", July 2012, AI Index: EUR 25/005/2012, www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/.../005/.../eur250052012en.pdf

"Greece must bring an end to racist and xenophobic attacks", Press release, 15 August 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/greece-must-bring-end-unacceptable-racist-attacks-2012-08-15>.

Policing Demonstrations in the European Union, October 2012, AI Index: EUR 01/022/2012. For the Racist Violence Recording Network Findings and recommendations for the Period of January to September 2012, see <http://goo.gl/R9rey>.

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