

EXTERNAL

AI INDEX NUMBER: EUR 30/08/92

Amnesty International
International Secretariat
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 8DJ
United Kingdom
Tel: (44) (71) 412 5500
Fax: (44) (71) 956 1157

10 September 1992

ITALY: THE ALLEGED-ILL-TREATMENT OF UMBERTO COLOMBO

Umberto Colombo was detained at the post of the railway police in Milan Central Station on 22 and 26 August 1992. Amnesty International is concerned about allegations made by Umberto Colombo that he was ill-treated by the police on both occasions and is seeking information from the authorities about the case.

The following information is based on articles which appeared in the local Milan news section of the national daily newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, on 27 and 28 August 1992 and which reported an interview carried out with Umberto Colombo on the afternoon of 26 August 1992.

The articles describe Umberto Colombo as 32 years old, with one or two convictions for petty crime and as having recently recovered from tuberculosis. He apparently has no close relatives, having been brought up as an orphan in various religious institutions.

He alleged that the first episode of ill-treatment occurred at approximately 6.30am on 22 August 1992 when he was approached by officers of the railway police (*Polfer - polizia ferroviaria*) in Milan's central station. He claimed that one of the police officers grasped his ear painfully and that he was then taken to the railway police post within Milan station and beaten by several police officers.

When he was released from the police post some time later he went to the local Fatebenefratelli hospital for treatment to his injuries. The hospital reportedly issued a medical certificate estimating that his injuries would take six days' to heal. On leaving the hospital he went to local police headquarters where he lodged a formal complaint (*denuncia*) against the railway police.

The second episode of alleged ill-treatment also occurred at Milan central station where Umberto Colombo was stopped by the railway police at approximately 7.45am on 26 August 1992. He alleged that on this occasion he was taken to the railway police post inside the station and beaten with truncheons. The railway police then took him to the local police headquarters in a police van and apparently forced him to withdraw his previous complaint.

After leaving the police station Umberto Colombo again went to Fatebenefratelli hospital which issued a medical certificate estimating that his injuries would take seven days to heal. He then went to a *carabinieri* office in the *via Moscova* and apparently gave a detailed account of his treatment by the railway police and lodged a second formal complaint against them.

The press article published on 27 August describes his appearance on the afternoon of 26 August; it states that he was walking painfully and bent over and when he took off his upper clothing the marks of a series of blows were clearly visible on his bare back. A photograph accompanied the article and showed various marks on Umberto Colombo's back.

On the following day, 28 August 1992, *Corriere della Sera* reported that three officers of the railway police, whom Umberto Colombo had accused of inflicting the ill-treatment, had decided to lodge a formal complaint of calumny against him. The charge of calumny carries a possible sentence of up to eight years' imprisonment in Italy and, in Amnesty International's experience, counter-charges of calumny are common in cases involving alleged ill-treatment by law enforcement and prison officers.