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Switzerland/G8: Allegations of human rights violations must be investigated

Amnesty International is concerned by emerging allegations of instances of unwarranted and excessive use of force by police officers against peaceful protestors and bystanders in the aftermath of the G8 Summit. There are also claims of arbitrary arrests and of violations of some of the fundamental rights of people deprived of their liberty.

"The authorities must initiate prompt, thorough, and impartial investigations into emerging allegations of human rights violations by police officers, where there is reasonable ground to believe that such violations have occurred, even if no formal complaint has been made. Where there is sufficient admissible evidence, the suspects should be prosecuted," Amnesty International stated.

Amnesty International is not aware of any allegations of human rights violations by law enforcement officers operating in Switzerland which have emerged from the two main -- centrally organized and authorized -- anti-G8 demonstrations which took place on 29 May 2003 in Lausanne, and between Geneva and Annemasse (France) on 1 June.

However, allegations have been made in the context of other recent demonstrations and violent clashes between protestors and police which have taken place in and around the cities of Geneva and Lausanne. Reports received by Amnesty International include the following:

On 1 June over 400 people were reportedly held for several hours inside a campsite for demonstrators near Lausanne while police, apparently seeking rioters and looters, proceeded with identity checks. Over 150 were transferred to, and held for further hours, in temporary detention facilities. Allegations regarding their treatment include: deprivation of food and water while exposed to intense heat for a prolonged period; failure to provide prompt and adequate medical attention; detention in overcrowded, confined facilities described as "cage-like"; women forced to use toilets in sight of male officers; detention of minors without parents being informed.

It has been claimed that on 1 June, German police officers (assisting the G8 policing operation and attached to the Geneva cantonal police) used unwarranted and excessive force against a group of reportedly peaceful demonstrators returning from the Geneva-Annemasse demonstration, including children, the disabled and elderly, who were trapped in a street where a violent confrontation ensued between the police and violent protestors. Accompanying them was Guy Smallman, a UK photographer reporting on G8 events, who was hit on his left calf, apparently by a stun grenade, and suffered serious skin and muscle damage requiring a series of operations. Police officers allegedly shouted abuse at him

during the wait for an ambulance.

There are reports that on 1 June several people offering only verbal or passive resistance were subjected to baton blows to the head, in at least one case requiring hospital treatment, during a police raid carried out on a cultural centre in Geneva which was temporarily housing independent media outlets reporting on anti-G8 protests. The authorities stated that the raid was carried out in order to track down rioters; some eight arrests were made.

A member of a Geneva 'Legal Team' acting as an independent and officially-recognized observer of events on the streets during the G8 period has lodged a criminal complaint alleging that a German police officer subjected him to a gratuitous assault. He said the officer used his baton to strike him on his arm and back, even though his Legal Team identification label was clearly displayed and he shouted out that he was a member of the Legal Team.

Amnesty International welcomes the prompt opening of an investigation, entrusted to an examining magistrate, into the circumstances which resulted in Martin Shaw, a UK citizen, suffering multiple fractures on 1 June, as a result of falling from a bridge on the Lausanne-Geneva motorway, after a police officer cut the rope from which he was hanging. (Martin Shaw and other protestors had blocked the motorway by stretching a banner and a rope across it: he and a female protestor were hanging on either side of the motorway, at the ends of the rope.) The police have stated that the rope was cut accidentally: protestors who were at the scene dispute this.

The organization recognizes the difficulties faced in policing major international meetings, especially if certain factions are set on causing violence and also recognizes that the authorities have a duty to ensure the safety and security of participants in such meetings, as well as of peaceful demonstrators, local inhabitants and property.

Amnesty International does not oppose the lawful use of reasonable force by law enforcement officers: if violence is used, the authorities must uphold law and order. However, policing must be carried out with full respect for international human rights standards, as underlined in letters the organization sent to the Swiss authorities in the lead-up to G8.

Background

In the lead-up to the G8 summit and the numerous connected demonstrations and protests expected in Switzerland, Amnesty International wrote to the relevant federal and cantonal authorities involved in the G8 policing operation.

In its letters the organization recognized and welcomed the steps taken by the authorities to enter into dialogue with demonstrators in the lead-up to G8 and the affirmation, in the rules of engagement adopted by the relevant cantonal and city authorities in May 2003, that proportionality should be a guiding principle for all G8 police interventions. At the same time, Amnesty International called on the authorities to ensure that all law enforcement officers, security and military personnel, *both domestic and foreign*, engaged in G8 policing be aware of, and act at all times in accordance with, key international human rights standards relating to: freedom of expression and assembly, the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials, the right not to be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention and the fundamental rights of people deprived of their liberty.

Amnesty International also urged that all officers, both domestic and foreign, engaged in direct interventions with the public during the G8 policing operation in Switzerland prominently display some form of individual identification -- such as a service number -- in line with the European Code of Police Ethics. The organization expressed concern at police statements that this would not be done, as it could clearly prevent the identification of alleged assailants and thus provide them with complete impunity.

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