

Italy: Amnesty International calls for an independent inquiry into actions by law enforcement officers during Global Forum in Naples

Amnesty International wrote today to the Italian Minister of the Interior to express concern about the disturbing reports of widespread abuses against protesters at a mass demonstration in Naples on 17 March.

The demonstration, held during the Global Forum, degenerated into violent clashes between groups of demonstrators attempting to enter the conference area and law enforcement officers. Both officers and demonstrators were injured and property was damaged.

In its letter AI is calling for the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry to fully and impartially investigate police tactics and behaviour in the context of the demonstration and to look at allegations of ill-treatment and use of force both on the streets and in police stations. The results of the inquiry to be made public at the earliest possible date.

"We recognize that the Italian authorities had a responsibility to ensure the safety and security of participants in the Global Forum and similarly recognize the difficulties inherent in policing such events, especially as certain factions are set on causing violence," Amnesty International said. "However, citizens have a legitimate right to express peacefully their views without fearing for their safety" added the organization.

Allegations against law enforcement officials include:

- Indiscriminate assaults by officers on non-violent protestors, including minors, trapped in a square sealed off by the police. These people were hit allegedly with rifle butts and truncheons, kicks, punches and stones, even though in many cases they approached officers with their hands in the air as an indication of peaceful intent;
- the beating of individuals taking photographs or videotaping scenes of use of excessive force by police and the destruction of cameras and film;
- failure to provide some injured detainees with prompt and adequate medical care;
- detainees being denied access to a lawyer and not allowed to have a member of the family or third person informed of their whereabouts;
- the ill-treatment of detainees, including minors in police stations. Some of them were reportedly made to kneel on the floor of police stations with their faces to the wall for lengthy periods and subjected to random and deliberate beatings with truncheons, slaps, kicks, punches and verbal insults frequently of an obscene, sexual nature. Many detainees were given intimate body searches and in a number of instances the conduct of officers during body searches appeared deliberately aimed at humiliating and degrading the detainees.

"Numerous reports from various sources, including witness and victim accounts as well as photographic evidence, present a disturbing picture of widespread abuses and violations of international human rights standards by members of the State Police, Carabinieri and Guardia di Finanza which we believe should be examined by an independent and comprehensive inquiry" Amnesty International said.

The organization also pointed out that prompt, thorough and impartial investigations, with the methods and findings made public, serve to protect the reputation of law enforcement officers who may be the subject of unfounded accusations of ill-treatment, as well as to safeguard the interests of genuine victims of ill-treatment.

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