

USA

New York Police Department – Serious allegations of abuse of transgender women (update)

Christina Sforza

Christina Sforza, a transgender woman, told Amnesty International how she was attacked in a New York restaurant in July 2006 by a man wielding a lead pipe. She said she was attacked for spending too long in the women's rest room which an employee gave her permission to use. The assailant shouted verbal abuse that was picked up by other staff and customers who allegedly egged him on shouting "kill the fag". Christina Sforza says that when officers from the New York Police Department (NYPD) arrived they refused to allow the emergency medical services to examine her injuries and arrested her, not her attacker. The police reportedly put her injured arm behind her back, handcuffed her, kicked her and pushed her into their car. Christina Sforza tried repeatedly to file a criminal complaint with the police against the man who beat her in the restaurant. She told Amnesty International that the last time she tried, she was threatened with arrest for attempting to make a false report.

Amnesty International, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, TransJustice of the Audre Lorde Project and others raised their concerns about Christina Sforza's treatment with various authorities. Christine Quinn, New York City Council Speaker, reportedly intervened in October 2006 and Christina Sforza was finally able to file a criminal complaint. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Advisor at the New York City District Attorney's Office has reportedly discussed the possibility of reopening investigations into the case. However, no further progress on the complaint or the investigation has been reported.

The allegations of police abuses made by Christina Sforza and Mariah Lopez are consistent with the findings of Amnesty International's report, *Stonewalled – still demanding respect: Police abuse and misconduct against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the USA* (AI Index: AMR 51/001/2006). These abuses include the use by police officers of sexually explicit and abusive language, threats and even physical violence. The report

Mariah Lopez

Mariah Lopez, a young transgender Latina woman, was arrested by NYPD officers on 17 June 2006. While she was in police custody male officers reportedly carried out repeated humiliating and unnecessary strip searches. She told Amnesty International that when she refused to go into the men's cell because she feared for her safety, police officers handcuffed her, tied her legs together, and dragged her into the cell. Once she was in the cell the officers allegedly beat her, hit her in the back of the head, pushed her face against the floor and kicked her in the genitals.

Mariah Lopez was charged with "loitering with intent to solicit" and with "assaulting officers". She said that she pleaded guilty in order to get out of jail where she felt she was at serious risk of attack and could no longer endure the psychological and emotional pressures of conditions in detention. She was released on 1 August 2006.

Despite repeated calls by Amnesty International for the allegations of police abuses to be investigated, no progress has been reported on the case.

documented a pattern of repeated and unnecessary searches of transgender individuals in police custody. Amnesty International's research also revealed that transgender women were often placed in cells with male inmates, exposing them to heightened risk of sexual violence. A key finding was that police officers often fail to investigate crimes against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people adequately.

More information is available at www.amnesty.org
Amnesty International, International Secretariat, Peter Benenson House,
1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom

What you can do:

Please write to **Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly**
New York Police Department,
1 Police Plaza, New York, NY 10038, USA

[Salutation: Dear Police Commissioner Kelly]

- ▶▶ **If you have written before, write again, enclosing a copy of your original letter, with a covering letter politely inviting a reply.**
- ▶▶ **If you have not written before, write expressing concern about the serious allegations of human rights violations by NYPD officers against Mariah Lopez and Christina Sforza.**
- ▶▶ **Emphasize that these serious allegations fit the patterns of abuse documented by Amnesty International and that if substantiated, such conduct by the NYPD officers would be in breach of US law and international human rights standards.**
- ▶▶ **Call on the NYPD to conduct immediate and impartial investigations into the allegations, make public the results, and ensure that any officers found guilty of human rights violations are brought to justice.**
- ▶▶ **Call on Police Commissioner Kelly to ensure that NYPD officers are trained on how to address transgender individuals with respect, conduct searches and apply appropriate detention policies and procedures for transgender individuals.**

COPIES

Send a copy of your letter to:

1. **Katie Doran**, Advisor to the District Attorney for LGBT Issues,
80 Centre Street, Room 604,
New York, NY 10013, USA

[Salutation: Dear Ms Doran]

In a covering note, welcome reports that the District Attorney's office has said it would reopen investigations into the case of Christina Sforza, and ask to be informed of progress. Ask her to conduct investigations into the allegations of discriminatory behaviour, torture or other ill-treatment of Mariah Lopez.

2. **Speaker Christine Quinn**, New York City Council
224 West 30th Street, Suite 1206,
New York, NY 10001, USA

[Salutation: Dear Speaker Quinn]

In a covering note, thank her for intervening in Christina Sforza's case and urge her to ensure that the NYPD conducts full investigations into the allegations of discriminatory behaviour, torture or ill-treatment of Mariah Lopez. Invite a reply. Urge her to continue to work with community stakeholders to further improve the NYPD policing policies and practices, especially as they impact on the LGBT community.

Who is Amnesty International?

Amnesty International is a global movement of 2.2 million people in more than 150 countries and territories, who campaign on human rights. Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards.

We research, campaign, advocate and mobilize to end abuses of human rights – civil, political, social, cultural and economic. From freedom of expression and association to physical and mental integrity, from protection from discrimination to the right to shelter – these rights are indivisible.

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