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Italy/G8 Summit: Amnesty International calls for commission of inquiry

In the light of continuing reports and allegations of human rights violations during the G8 policing operation in Genoa, the conduct of the Italian law enforcement and prison officers involved should be comprehensively investigated by an independent commission of inquiry, Amnesty International said today.

The organization wrote to Italy's Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, expressing concern about the alleged human rights violations committed in the context of the G8 policing operation and asking for the Italian authorities' cooperation in ensuring that such allegations are promptly and thoroughly investigated.

While welcoming the initiation of criminal investigations by the Italian judicial authorities, Amnesty International believes that -- given the scale and gravity of the allegations still emerging, and the very high level of domestic and international concern -- these investigations are unlikely to provide an adequate response.

"As well as safeguarding the interests of genuine victims of torture or ill-treatment, a prompt, impartial and effective investigation by an independent commission would also serve to protect the reputations of law enforcement and prison officers who may be the subject of unfounded accusations of excessive force, torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment," the organization added.

In its letter the organization sets out the criteria that should inform the establishment of a commission of inquiry, including:

that it should comprise people of acknowledged probity and impartiality;

that its scope, methods and findings should be made public;

that the commission should be given jurisdiction to take evidence from alleged victims of ill-treatment, and that such people be protected against harassment and intimidation;

that the commission should also be empowered to summon and take evidence from law enforcement and prison officers.

"The commission of enquiry should file interim reports to facilitate the prompt initiation of any appropriate criminal or disciplinary proceedings, identifying specific instances and individuals whenever possible," Amnesty International recommended, adding that these reports should also facilitate prompt amendments to regulations, laws, training and procedures relevant to law enforcement and prison officers.

In a previous letter sent to the Italian Minister of the Interior ahead of the G8 Summit, Amnesty International had urged the Italian authorities to ensure that law enforcement officials engaged in the policing of the G8 Summit were aware of, and at all times acted in accordance with, relevant international human rights standards.

"We are now asking the Italian authorities to provide us with information on any relevant instructions and training which were given to state officers in the lead up to G8 with regard to these standards," the organization said.

Background

Amnesty International is concerned about allegations that:

- in the days immediately preceding the G8 summit, some protestors with apparently peaceful intent were not allowed to enter Italy or were expelled and not allowed to proceed to Genoa, thus violating their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. In incidents at the Port of Ancona some such protestors were allegedly subjected to ill-treatment by law enforcement officers;

- law enforcement officers used excessive force on the streets during demonstrations which took place on Friday 20 and Saturday 21 July,

inflicting indiscriminate assaults, including beatings with batons, on -- amongst others -- non-violent protestors and journalists reporting on the demonstrations;

- during a police raid carried out on buildings legally occupied by the Genoa Social Forum (GSF) in the early hours of Sunday, 22 July law enforcement officers subjected individuals detained to deliberate and gratuitous beatings, resulting in numerous injuries, some of them requiring urgent hospitalization and in some cases surgical operations. Up to 20 people were reportedly carried out of the building on stretchers, two of them apparently in a coma;

- dozens of people were subjected to arbitrary and illegal arrest and detention, including the majority of those detained during the raid on the Genoa Social Forum;

- during transfer in police vehicles and inside detention facilities law enforcement and prison officers subjected individuals to beatings and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. It has been claimed, amongst other things, that detainees were slapped, kicked punched and spat on, subjected to verbal abuse, sometimes of an obscene sexual nature, were deprived of food, water and sleep for lengthy periods, made to line up with their faces against the wall and remain for hours spread-eagled, and beaten, in particular on parts of their bodies already injured during arrest if they failed to maintain this position. Some detainees were apparently threatened with death and, in the case of female detainees, rape;

- many people were denied the internationally-recognized rights of people deprived of their liberty, in some cases for several days. This included denial of prompt access to lawyers and, in the case of foreigners, consular officials, and denial of prompt and adequate medical care. In addition, many were not allowed to have their relatives promptly notified of their whereabouts and were not informed of their rights.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44
20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>