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**UNITED KINGDOM:  
ALLEGED ILL-TREATMENT OF AMER RAFIQ**

Amer Rafiq was allegedly ill-treated by Manchester police on 21 February 1996, which resulted in the loss of his right eye and other injuries. Amnesty International urges the authorities to carry out an independent and full inquiry into the incident; to bring criminal proceedings against any officer found to be responsible for the injuries; and to pay Amer Rafiq full compensation for his injuries.

Amer Rafiq, a 21-year-old part-time student and waiter of Pakistani origin, had finished work at 2am on 21 February 1996. He then joined his friends on Wilmslow Road in Manchester at the end of the Muslim Eid celebrations (to mark the end of Ramadan). The account of what happened next is in dispute. The following description is based on an account given in the Manchester Evening News by Amer Rafiq's brother-in-law, Azar Iqbal.

“He stopped at a phone box on Wilmslow Road to ring his mother to say he was going to be late home. A police officer came up to him and told him to move his car, which was parked on the main road. He said he would, finished his phone call then got back in his car. The officer then just grabbed him again and told him he'd been cheeky. He got very pushy, ripping his jacket and then threw [him] in the back of the van. Amer was calling for help and one of his friends in the car went towards him and he got arrested as well and put in a different van.”

The police said he had been arrested at 2.30am in relation to public disorder offences, become abusive, threatened an officer in Wilmslow Road and needed to be restrained.

The police van took him to Platt Lane police station. A police spokesperson said that he was taken out of the van at 2.55am, that the seriousness of his injury was noticed, and that at 3.05am he was taken by the police to the hospital. Azar Iqbal said: “Before he got in the police van, he was perfectly well. By the time he arrived at the station, he was a bloody mess.” In addition to his eye injury, his lawyer stated he had “very nasty” neck and back injuries. His friend, Azeem Hussain, who was also arrested, was at the police station when Amer Rafiq arrived. He gave the following account to the Manchester Evening News:

“I heard his voice and looked around. I was stunned by what I saw. Two officers were trying to hold him up and there was blood everywhere. He saw me and begged me to help. He was crying but instead of tears he was crying blood. They repeatedly asked him his name, but he could only mumble. Eventually one of them said: ‘He's a goner’ and he was taken away. I was shouting at them to get him help. To get him to a doctor. Finally they took him off to hospital.”

He underwent a four-hour operation to save his right eye, which was removed from a shattered socket. Amer Rafiq also reportedly fears that his other eye may be permanently damaged.

Police accepted that his injuries occurred during his arrest and move to the police station, where he was accompanied by three police officers from the Tactical Aid Group. Altogether four officers have been identified as having been involved in the arrest of Amer Rafiq. To date none of the officers involved has been suspended pending investigation.

Officers from the Tactical Aid Group were part of the reported 200 police presence at the annual Eid celebration, which had attracted a record 2,000 people. The evening had progressed peacefully until around 11.30pm when there was public disorder and nine arrests were subsequently made. Community leaders have criticized as “insensitive” the use of the Tactical Aid Group for community celebrations.

Amer Rafiq’s friend, Azeem Hussain, denied that he and Amer were part of a gang of Asian youths involved in the disorder on Wilmslow Road. “When the police picked us up the street was quiet. Everyone had gone. It was all over.” However, the police claim that they were still in the process of clearing the area, trying to disperse youths who were driving up and down the road.

The investigation into the incident is being carried out by an outside police force; it is being led by Merseyside Police Superintendent David Birch and supervised by the Police Complaints Authority. Once the investigation has been completed, the Crown Prosecution Service will have to decide whether to bring charges against the officers involved. At the same time Amer Rafiq is suing the police for his injuries.