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EXTERNAL



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ROMANIA

ALLEGED ILL-TREATMENT OF BELMONDO COBZARU BY POLICE OFFICERS

Amnesty International's concerns:

Amnesty International (AI) is concerned about new reports of ill-treatment by police officers in Romania. In one such incident, in July 1997, Belmondo Cobzaru was allegedly ill-treated by police officers in Mangalia, a Black Sea holiday resort. If confirmed this report would represent a violation of Romania's international treaty obligations including Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 3 of the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms which state that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Background:

According to reports received by Amnesty International, at around 8pm on 4 July 1997, Belmondo Cobzaru, a 24-year-old Rom, was ill-treated by police officers at Mangalia police station. He had voluntarily presented himself at the police station in order to explain an earlier incident in which he had broken into his girlfriend's apartment, in the presence of her neighbours, fearing that she had attempted to commit suicide. He was accompanied to the police station by a friend, who then informed the Cobzaru family of his whereabouts. Belmondo Cobzaru claims that he was severely beaten at the police station by Sergeant Major G and Officer C¹. Four plainclothes officers observed the beating and took no steps to prevent or halt it. Sergeant Major G and Officer C reportedly punched Belmondo Cobzaru in the head until his nose started to bleed and he was thrown to the ground and kicked. A newspaper was placed on the back of his neck (apparently to prevent signs of injury) and he was hit with a wooden stick. Before he was released Belmondo Cobzaru was forced to sign a statement stating that he had been beaten by his girlfriend's brother-in-law and some other men. At around 10.30pm he was allowed to leave the station and told to return the next morning with his father, who is the leader of a local Roma organization.

¹The full names of the police officers are known to Amnesty International.

Belmondo Cobzaru was met outside the station by the friend who had accompanied him, and went to her house. Later that evening he was admitted to Mangalia hospital and then transferred to the neurosurgical ward of Constanța County Hospital, where he was treated for head injuries. He was released on 7 July and was examined by a forensic medical expert, who issued a certificate describing bruising around the eyes, on the third and fourth fingers of the right hand, chest, right thigh and leg. On 21 July 1997, Belmondo Cobzaru filed a complaint about police ill-treatment with the Constanța Military Prosecutor.

Amnesty International's recommendations:

As a State Party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Romania is bound to initiate a prompt and impartial investigation whenever an individual has alleged that torture or other ill-treatment has occurred or, even if no complaint has been made, there are reasonable grounds to believe that such ill-treatment has occurred.

Amnesty International urges the Romanian authorities to ensure that the investigation into the reported ill-treatment of Belmondo Cobzaru is carried out promptly, impartially and thoroughly, that the findings are made public and that any law enforcement officer who is found responsible for violating human rights is brought to justice.