

PUBLIC

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SWITZERLAND: ALLEGED ILL-TREATMENT OF RASHID ABDUL-ACKAH BY OFFICERS OF THE ZÜRICH MUNICIPAL POLICE

Amnesty International is concerned about the alleged ill-treatment of Rashid Abdul-Ackah by police officers attached to the Zürich Municipal Police (*Stadtpolizei*) in November 1999. In a complaint lodged with the judicial authorities in December 1999 Rashid Abdul-Ackah, a Swiss citizen of Ghanaian origin, accused police officers of causing him bodily harm (*Körperverletzung*), abusing their authority (*Amtsmissbrauch*), subjecting him to racial discrimination (*Rassendiskriminierung*) and illegal detention (*Freiheitsberaubung*) following identity checks. Amnesty International welcomes the opening of a judicial investigation by the Zürich District Attorney's office and is seeking confirmation that it is being carried out thoroughly and impartially, in the manner required by international standards.

In his complaint, Rashid Abdul-Ackah, an economics student living in Zürich and married to a Swiss citizen, stated that while walking through central Zürich on 23 November 1999 two police officers stopped him on the corner of Lang- and Militär street between around 3 and 4 p.m. and asked him for his identity papers. After finding his papers in order, the police returned them to him and Rashid Abdul-Ackah continued on his way, walking towards Limmat Square. He said that when three police officers approached him after approximately 500 metres and asked him for his identity papers, he told them that he had just undergone a check but complied with the request to show his identity papers again. The police officers made several radio calls to check his identity papers and then returned them. Following this second identity check, Rashid Abdul-Ackah said he took issue, verbally, with the statement made by an officer that the police were obliged to carry out such checks on him because his "compatriots sold drugs". He said that in response he asked if they thought that all Africans sold drugs and that there was a correlation between a black skin and drug-dealing. He said he was offended by the police officer's comment and asserted that Swiss nationals could behave just the same as Africans and that Swiss people were imprisoned in Latin America for drugs-related offences.

He said that the police officers then asked him to produce his identity papers once again, justifying the request by stating that they had forgotten to note something down and had to check something. He alleged that the officers proceeded to knock him to the ground, handcuffed him, subjected him to racist abuse, took him to the Urania police station, put him in a locked cell and ordered him to strip. He was released without charge later that day and sought medical treatment at the emergency unit of a local hospital, the *Universitätsspital Zürich*, which issued a medical report recording contusions to his left arm and head. Rashid Abdul-Ackah maintains that there were no legal grounds for his detention and that the only reason the police took him to the police station was in order to humiliate him.

He lodged a complaint against the Zürich Municipal Police with the Zürich District Attorney's office. A judicial investigation was then opened, entrusted to the Zürich Cantonal Police under the direction of the District Attorney.¹ Amnesty International understands that in February 2000 the Cantonal Police interviewed Rashid Abdul-Ackah about his allegations but is concerned by the fact that he was not allowed to have his lawyer present during the interview. The organization is also anxious to establish what steps have been taken in the course of the investigation to identify and interview possible eye-witnesses to the incidents of 23 November 1999.

Anyone wishing further details relating to Amnesty International's concerns in Switzerland should consult the following publications:

- Amnesty International Report 2000
- Amnesty International Concerns in Europe: January - June 2000 (AI Index: EUR 01/03/00)
- Amnesty International Concerns in Europe: July - December 1999 (AI Index: EUR 01/01/00)
- Switzerland - Comments relating to the submission of the Third Periodic Report to the UN Committee against Torture (AI Index: EUR 43/02/97)

¹ Two police forces operate in Zürich - the Municipal and the Cantonal Police: complaints against one force may be investigated by the other force.