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ITALY: INCREASE IN ALLEGATIONS OF ILL-TREATMENT BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Law enforcement officers in cities throughout Italy are ill-treating detainees by kicking them, punching them and beating them, according to allegations received by Amnesty International.

The human rights organization is concerned that elements within some Italian law enforcement agencies may be subjecting detainees to ill-treatment on a regular basis.

"During the 1990s there has been a noticeable increase in the number of allegations that people held in the custody of law enforcement and prison officers in Italy have been subjected to gratuitous and deliberate physical violence," says Amnesty International.

The United Nations (UN) Committee against Torture (CAT) will be examining tomorrow a report submitted by the Italian authorities in July 1994 on the implementation of the UN Convention against Torture in the country. An earlier report from Italy was examined in Geneva in April 1992.

"Although Italy has adopted certain legislative and administrative measures designed to combat the use of ill-treatment against detainees, in practice these are not being fully respected," says Amnesty International. In a report submitted also to the committee, the organization details its concerns regarding allegations of torture and ill-treatment in Italy, which it hopes will be taken into account when the committee examines the Italian Government's submission.

The Amnesty International report cites numerous instances of alleged ill-treatment by officers attached to the state police, *carabinieri* and municipal police in the 20 months up to December 1994. The allegations have come from across the country, including cities like Bologna, Florence, Genoa, Milan, Naples, Padua, Palermo, Rome and Turin. In some of these places there have been multiple complaints of ill-treatment, a high proportion of which concern immigrants from outside Western Europe -- most of them from Africa-- and an increasing number of Roma. Some cases have involved minors.

Repeated slaps, kicks and punches, beatings with truncheons frequently accompanied by general verbal abuse and -- in the case of immigrants and Roma -- racial abuse are the most common forms of ill-treatment. There have been isolated reports of sexual assault and of law enforcement officers threatening detainees with guns.

"We have received reports of detainees being deprived of food for up to 24 hours. Officers attached to one city police force are said to have chained some immigrants to hot water radiators and transported others outside the city, removed their shoes and thus forced them to walk back barefoot," says Amnesty International.

In many cases, allegations have been supported by medical and eye-witness evidence. Detainees frequently claim that when they have indicated their intention of lodging a complaint they are then threatened with further ill-treatment or criminal counter-charges, such as resisting or insulting a public officer, calumny or defamation. When formal complaints are lodged, judicial investigations are routinely opened, but a number of these have appeared to lack thoroughness. In cases where officers have been found guilty of ill-treating detainees, the sentences passed by the courts have frequently been nominal.

Allegations of ill-treatment by prison officers -- sometimes concerning large numbers of inmates -- have been reported from over a dozen prisons during the 1990s. They frequently have been accompanied by complaints of severe overcrowding, poor sanitation and inadequate medical assistance.

Italy has ratified the principal international instruments prohibiting torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. However, as the Amnesty International report points out, both the UN Human Rights Committee and the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture have recently expressed concern over the ill-treatment of detainees in the country and have recommended that the authorities take more effective steps to safeguard them from such treatment. Amnesty International believes such reforms are urgently needed.

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Amnesty International's report entitled: Italy - Alleged Torture and Ill-treatment by law enforcement and prison officers (AI Index: EUR 30/01/95) is available in English, French and Spanish. For further information please contact the International Secretariat Press Office in London on the following number: 0171 413 5566