

Mr Thomas Bodström,
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
S -103 33 Stockholm
Sweden

1 August 2001

Dear Minister of Justice,

Amnesty International is writing to express concern about policing during the European Union summit in Gothenburg on 14 to 16 June 2001. According to reports received by the organization, the police used excessive force during the anti-globalization demonstrations, some of which degenerated into violence and caused injuries to people and significant damage to property. It was reported in the media that 118 people were injured, including 56 police officers; among them 43 people were hospitalized, including a policeman with a serious head injury caused by a rock hurled by a protester. Although Amnesty International does not condone violent attacks on the police, the police, as law enforcement officials, are obliged to act at all times in accordance with national law and international treaties which have been ratified by Sweden, as well as other well-established international standards.

In particular, Amnesty International is concerned that the police used live ammunition, and that as a consequence, three people suffered gunshot wounds on Friday evening, 15 June. It has been alleged that the firing of shots at demonstrators was not preceded by warning shots; Amnesty International would be grateful to receive clarification on whether warnings were given. The use by police of firearms in these circumstances may have violated international standards which protect the right to life and prescribe the circumstances in which firearms may be used.

The United Nations (UN) Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials define the circumstances under which enforcement officials may use force and firearms. According to these principles, which have been accepted internationally, law enforcement officials shall only use firearms if other means remain ineffective or without any promise of achieving the intended result. Firearms may be used against people only after giving warning, in order to prevent death or serious injuries, where less extreme means are insufficient to achieve such objectives. In doing so, law enforcement officials must respect and preserve human life, and minimize damage and injury. Firearms may only be used in the dispersal of violent assemblies when less dangerous means are not practicable, and only to the minimum extent necessary. The principles underscore that intentional lethal use of firearms may be made only when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. Principles 4, 5, 9, 10 and 14 state the following:

Principle 4 states:

“Law enforcement officials, in carrying out their duty, shall as far as possible apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force and firearms. They may use force and firearms only if other means remain ineffective or without any promise of achieving the intended result.”

Principle 5 states:

“Whenever the lawful use of force and firearms is unavoidable, law enforcement officials shall:

- a) exercise restraint in such use and act in proportion to the seriousness of the offence and the legitimate objective to be achieved;
- b) minimize damage and injury, and respect and preserve human life;
- c) ensure that assistance and medical aid are rendered to any injured or affected persons at the earliest possible moment;
- d) ensure that relatives or close friends of the injured or affected person are notified at the earliest possible moment.”

Principle 9 states:

“Law enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self- defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury, to prevent the perpetration of a particularly serious crime involving grave threat to life, to arrest a person presenting such a danger and resisting their authority, or to prevent his or her escape, and only when less extreme means are insufficient to achieve these objectives. In any event, intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.”

Principle 10 states:

“In the circumstances provided for under principle 9, law enforcement officials shall identify themselves as such and give a clear warning of their intent to use firearms, with sufficient time for the warning to be observed, unless to do so would unduly place the law enforcement officials at risk or would create a risk of death or serious harm to other persons, or would be clearly inappropriate or pointless in the circumstances of the incident.”

Principle 14 states:

“In the dispersal of violent assemblies, law enforcement officials may use firearms only when less dangerous means are not practicable and only to the minimum extent necessary. Law enforcement officials shall not use firearms in such cases, except under the conditions stipulated in principle 9.”

Amnesty International urges the government to initiate an independent investigation into the full circumstances of the shootings. The investigation should be prompt, thorough, and impartial, and its scope, methods and findings should be made public. It should include a determination about whether, in each instance in which a police officer fired a gun, the use of lethal force was consistent with the above-cited international standards. Amnesty International notes that the authorities have already initiated an investigation into the shooting incidents by the police. We would welcome information on the nature, and scope of each such investigation, and on their findings when they are reached. We would also welcome any instructions given to the police on the use of firearms in policing the

demonstrations from 14 to 16 June.

The organization also urges the government to take all necessary measures to ensure that the police are adequately equipped and trained to employ legitimate non-lethal methods of crowd control and moreover, are subject to strict regulations regarding the use of such methods, and to a strict system of accountability. We note that the government is initiating an independent inquiry into the use of firearms by police; indeed the Chairperson of the Board of the Swedish section of Amnesty International was contacted about her possible participation in such an inquiry. We urge the inquiry to examine not only alternative and non-lethal methods of crowd control, but more generally the training and regulations on the permissible use of lethal force by law enforcement officials in other situations.

The organization is also concerned about allegations that police used excessive force against demonstrators who were not involved in violent protest, including beatings with batons. The organization is further concerned about reports that police officers kicked or beat people with batons after they had been detained and, in some instances, restrained with their hands tied behind their back, lying down on the ground. Furthermore, it was reported that people were detained arbitrarily without charge, in some instances for many hours, during police actions at two schools. According to reports, 102 people have made complaints against the police, including for ill-treatment or illegal detention.

The complaints of illegal detention appear to stem from police actions in Hvitfeldska and Schillerska schools, where many of the people participating in the events surrounding the summit were attending meetings or sleeping on floors. Allegations of ill-treatment were also made in connection with the police actions. Amnesty International has received the following accounts of what allegedly occurred in the two schools.

Hvitfeldska Gymnasiet (school) was apparently roped off in the late morning on 14 June by the police who were reportedly searching for weapons. All the people inside were detained and not allowed to leave. People outside were not allowed to enter; instead many of those who tried to enter were reportedly searched (including female protesters being searched by male officers), put on buses, driven away from the area and told not to return to the school. There was apparently no explanation given and people began to get angry about the police action and to protest. That same evening, those people who were at Hvitfeldska school, who refused to show their identity cards or to allow themselves to be searched, were arrested and transferred to buses where they were held in detention until the next morning. About 240 people were held on the buses. Some people claimed that they had been detained for about 19 hours, at the school and then in the buses.

Amnesty International received the following eye-witness account of some of the events at Hvitfeldska school:

“We arrived in Gothenburg by bus on Thursday at about 6 a.m. ... Sorting out the accommodation was not possible that early in the morning, so we were directed to the Hvitfeldska school for a temporary place to sleep. We slept for a few hours and at around 10 a.m. one of our group members left for the city to sort out our

sleeping arrangements. After that the rest of us began planning on going to town and finding a local coffee shop. When I stepped out into the school yard with my friends at about 10:30 a.m. I saw the beginning of a massive police operation. We were about to leave the school area when dozens of policemen rushed to the site and announced that we had no right to leave the area. They gave us no explanation for this, but we heard that the police were possibly going to search or raid the school.

“In the area where the Hvitfeldska school is located there were in fact three schools that were all besieged by the police and later surrounded by ship containers which arrived on site surprisingly quickly. ... At first we were held at the Hvitfeldska school together with the so-called black masks and after the police withdrew from the road connecting the schools, we were able to transfer to the third school where we were supposed to be accommodated for the rest of the time. However, the police siege lasted for the entire day, and at about 4 p.m. we were told that we would be released from the school if we submitted ourselves and our belongings to a police search. We decided to leave. ... demonstration placards, flags, magazines and pins had to be left behind at the school because we could not take them ... the police had announced that only personal belongings were to be taken with us. Later on we tried twice to get the placards back from the police but were unsuccessful. We later heard that the placards had been labelled as ‘weapons that can also be used as placards’. They were sticks of 20 mm in diameter. ...

“In the evening we participated in the demonstration against George W. Bush, which went very smoothly, with 15,000 people present. After the Bush demonstration several thousand people went to the Hvitfeldska school to demand that the school be opened and that the people held there be released. During this solidarity protest we saw how the activists who were held inside tried to escape, and many succeeded by climbing over the ship containers and jumping into the crowd of demonstrators. The police reacted to the escape attempts violently by riding (on horses) into the escapers and people demonstrating peacefully (but determinedly). The ones who tried to escape by running from the school, without violence, were also beaten with batons and pushed down from the containers. The siege ended at night in mass arrests and the area was cleared.”

Amnesty International also received reports that on Saturday evening, 16 June, armed police entered Schillerska school (Schillerska Gymnasiet) and shouted at those present to lie down on the floor. After about 20 minutes the police led the people out of the school and ordered them to lie down on the ground, which apparently was wet because it had rained. People lay on the wet ground, some of them crying and shaking, for about an hour. Some people claimed that if they tried to look up, they were told to keep quiet and look down. Eye-witnesses claimed that some people were beaten with batons as they lay on the ground. One person claimed he was kicked because he did not hold his hands behind his neck properly. Around them dogs were barking and police officers were shouting. Around 70 to 75 people were detained, identified, filmed and released a few hours later. Newspaper reports afterwards stated that the police had searched the school and everyone present because they were looking for three people who were said to be heavily armed; Amnesty International would be grateful to receive clarification as to whether any weapons were found.

A Greek journalist told Amnesty International that although he twice

informed police that he was a journalist and in the school to interview people, he was also arrested and forced to lie face down on the wet ground with his hands tied behind his back for an hour. He alleged that, while lying down, he was hit with a baton on the head and on the arms when he tried to talk to a policeman. The journalist suffered from concussion as a result.

The following is an account by a Finnish person who was detained and allegedly ill- treated by the police:

“At approximately 9.50 p.m. I was sitting on the main stairs of a school [Schillerska Gymnasiet] in Gothenburg. I was talking with a friend and having a snack while waiting for the bus back to Finland, when suddenly a black van speeded to the schoolyard and members of a police anti-terrorist group rushed out. They started running towards us shouting in Swedish and pointing at us with machine guns. I understood the command ‘down’ (‘ner’) and lay down on the ground immediately. The police dragged people out of the school building; some were kicked to the ground.

“We lay in rows on the ground in the schoolyard. My hands were tied behind my back with cable ties. The ground was wet and I was freezing. I did not dare ask for an explanation. Two fingers in my left hand were getting numb because the cable tie was so tight. Police dogs were barking and I was scared.

“After midnight the police lifted me up and told me to go stand next to a wall. They asked my nationality and whether I was armed. I answered that I was Finnish and not armed. The policeman who escorted me twisted the cable ties so that they got tighter and hurt me. He said in Finnish: ‘bloody Finns’, and squeezed my left shoulder, apparently with the intention of hurting me without leaving any marks. The same policeman said then in English: ‘Don’t ever come back, do you understand?’ He searched my pockets and pinched my thigh at the same time. The other policeman holding me reacted to this by remarking: ‘Are you satisfied now?’. I said ‘No’ while the other policeman twisted my wrists. The cable ties left bruises on my wrists [supporting medical evidence].

“I was forced to lie on the ground on my stomach again, dragged for about half a metre and left to lie there. After a while the cable ties were removed and I was told to keep my hands on my head. The others and I lay like this until approximately 1.30 a.m. when I was escorted into a police bus. There were no Swedes in the bus, they were mainly Finnish, Dutch, German and Norwegian people.

“Some people asked for an explanation for what was happening, but no answer was given. ... Just after 4 a.m. the police took me, and two other Finnish people and two Norwegians off the bus. We were given the opportunity to collect our things from the school and I was searched again. ... We were taken to a refugee centre located in a suburb of Gothenburg. The police left us with the workers in the refugee centre. ... We were told that we would be taken to Finland by airplane soon. ... On Sunday morning three of us were taken to an airport by car and put in a small airplane with eight seats. ... I am still unaware of the reason why I had to go through all the above-mentioned: assaults, threats, deprivation of my liberty and deportation. I am afraid that this episode will lead to having my name in some records and restrict my freedom of movement.”

According to reports received by the organization, over 500 people were detained or arrested by police, the majority of whom were subsequently released. Amnesty International has received reports that among those still detained pending investigation or trial some

people were kept in isolation, and that they were denied their mail or books sent from their families.

An account of the treatment of detainees was given to Amnesty International by relatives of one Danish person, who was arrested on 14 June with six others (known as "the Seven Group") in a café and charged with being part of a group of people who threw rocks at the police near Hvitfeldska school. The 20-year-old detainee was held in isolation for four weeks. During this time he was not allowed to receive any letters from his family, and was not permitted to associate with other detainees. His family were allowed to visit him once, after three weeks. After four weeks, the restriction on him receiving mail was lifted, his family was allowed to visit again, and telephone contact between him and his family was permitted. He also had access to a radio and TV. He was still kept in his cell, which he now shared with one other detainee, only being allowed out to have a half-hour walk outside a day, and three times a week to have exercise, as well as for showers. It was also reported that one of those detained was a young woman, who was kept on the men's wing.

Amnesty International would be grateful to be informed of the nature of the investigations that have been set up into allegations of police use of ill-treatment and excessive force towards demonstrators and arbitrary detention. Amnesty International calls on the government to ensure that these investigations are independent and impartial. Amnesty International would also be grateful to receive information about the number of people who have been charged, and on the nature of these charges, as well as the results of all prosecutions brought in connection with these incidents. The organization would also welcome any other information which you consider may assist us in an assessment of the events.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Gilmore
Interim Secretary General