

Genevan police accused of prison violence

| 09:45 Almost a third of inmates interviewed at Champ-Dollon facility say they have been ill-treated by officers during arrests and interrogations. A panel of experts denounces the situation and calls for changes.



© Crédit photo | Jean-Pierre Restellini and other panel members deliver damning report on police behavior at Champ-Dollon. | Photo: Guiraud Laurent

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Genevan police have been accused of violence and torture of prisoners at the Champ-Dollon prison in a report by experts, issued this week. Of 125 detainees interviewed, 30 per cent said they had been abused by police with kicks, slaps, suffocation and other forms of violence, the report said.

“It’s too much, far too much,” said Jean-Pierre Restellini, one of the three people appointed to look into the prison situation in the wake of numerous complaints from prisoners. Restellini, a member of the European committee for the prevention of torture, said he had never seen the kind of allegations made by the Champ-Dollon prisoners. A total of 38 prisoners interviewed complained of being ill-treated by police either while being arrested or when being questioned. Some also alleged police insulted them with racial comments.

One person, a minor at the time of the incident, said his head was immersed repeatedly in a container of water. Others complained of being hit while they were lying on the ground or of receiving blows to the head. Restellini said a lawyer should be present when police question detainees and such interrogations should take place in a room equipped with cameras. He also recommended better access to doctors for the prisoners.

The panel of experts also highlighted the overpopulation of the prison, designed to accommodate 270 people. There were 472 in the facility when the experts investigated the situation. The experts were appointed by the cantonal parliament to investigate the prison situation after 200 prisoners signed a petition on March 30, 2006, complaining about the conditions. Earlier this week, the Swiss league of human rights, in its own report, said fundamental rights were being flouted in the facility.

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