

Mr. Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders  
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Mr. David Kaye, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection the right to freedom of opinion and expression  
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Ms. Annalisa Ciampi, Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.  
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Mr. Vitit Muntarbhorn  
Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity  
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10<sup>th</sup> August 2017

Dear Mr Muntarbhorn, Mr Forst, Mr Kaye and Ms Ciampi,

**Re: Costantino Saporito (Italy)**

First of all, I wish to thank you for your joint intervention in relation to LGBT human rights defenders in Honduras (as publicised on the OHCHR website on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2017).

I am writing to you in relation to the case of **Mr Costantino Saporito**. Mr Saporito is an Italian firefighter and trade unionist (national coordinator) of the Italian union USB (Unione Sindicale di Base) who took part in a Pride parade in Rome on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

Mr Saporito was apparently one of about 40 fire fighters who took part in the Pride parade in uniform. During the Pride march, he addressed the media stressing the indivisibility of human rights (which was placed on youtube<sup>1</sup> by the USB on the day of the Pride Parade) and held a sign reading ‘My liberty protects yours’ (La mia liberta protegge la tua).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4JvFV\\_lhgc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4JvFV_lhgc)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NB1XOME52Mo> (see 0:48)

As a number of media clips on youtube corroborate, Mr Saporito is an outspoken unionist who has addressed issues of public concern including workers' rights<sup>3</sup> and operational issues such as a shortage of helicopters<sup>4</sup> for fire fighters.

It was reported that he is now subject to disciplinary proceedings by his employers (the public institution of the Italian National Fire Corps) on the basis that - as a result of his participation in the Pride march in uniform<sup>5</sup> - his wearing of the uniform is "**considered as damaging to the dignity** with which all workers of the National Corps are urged to wear the service uniform". It is reported that Mr Saporito is now awaiting a disciplinary hearing and sanctions could include his dismissal.

I am concerned that Mr Saporito is now being subjected to disciplinary measures predominantly for having participated in the Pride March and effectively for speaking up for and seeking to protect and promote the human rights of LGBTI people. One of the articles on the internet also expressed its concern that a motivation behind the institution of disciplinary measures against Mr Saporito (as the only individual firefighter who was singled out for disciplinary action) may also be his prominent union activism.

Apart from the dampening effect as such an action on freedom of opinion and expression and on the rights to freedom of assembly and association, and the effect on Mr Saporito himself as a human rights defender, it is also (I believe) of concern that a public body such as the Italian National Fire Corps (which, I understand, falls within the responsibility of the Interior Ministry in Italy) not only initiates disciplinary proceedings for a participation in a peaceful public demonstration but does so on grounds that clearly discriminate against LGBTIQ individuals (in that the **issue** of LGBT rights **itself** is equated with unacceptability, frivolity and ridiculousness by the authorities).

In the words of Sebastiano Secci, spokesman for Roma Pride, "it is of unprecedented concern that the proximity to the LGBTQI community could be considered as exposing the institution of firefighters to public ridicule".

Mr Saporito himself stressed that as a fire service, its public duty is to save human beings and their sexual orientation, race, sex, nationality, religious belief etc is entirely irrelevant.<sup>6</sup>

The public position taken by the Italian National Fire Corps is hence of considerable concern in relation to an institution which should value and protect human life equally. Furthermore, it is also of concern that since this occurrence Mr Saporito has been subjected to homophobic threats.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LizopWCAL98>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQdy595B1p4>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.romapride.it/vigili-del-fuoco-roma-pride-momento-spegnere-pregiudizi/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NB1XQME52Mo>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NB1XQME52Mo>

I would be extremely grateful if you could kindly take this matter up with the Italian authorities.

Yours sincerely,

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References:

Petition on <https://go.allout.org/en/a/firefighter/>

<http://www.romapride.it/vigili-del-fuoco-roma-pride-momento-spegnere-pregiudizi/>

<http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2017/07/10/gay-pride-procedimento-disciplinare-per-il-pompiere-che-ha-sfilato-in-divisa-non-era-stato-autorizzato/3720950/>

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