

26 February 2021

Italy: Migrant rights defenders Lorena Fornasir and Gian Andrea Franchi's home searched

On 23 February 2021, police searched the house of migrant rights defenders **Lorena Fornasir** and **Gian Andrea Franchi**. From the search warrant presented to the defenders, Gian Andrea Franchi learned that an investigation has been launched against him in relation to charges of 'aiding illegal immigration'.

[Lorena Fornasir](#), a 68 year old psychotherapist and [Gian Andrea Franchi](#), an 84 year old retired teacher are both active migrants and refugee rights defenders. Since 2015, Lorena Fornasir and Gian Andrea Franchi have been welcoming and providing medicine, clothes, water and food to migrants in the square in front of Trieste's main train station. In 2019 they founded "La Linea d'Ombra" in Trieste, a volunteer organisation that raises funds to support migrants in need. The migrant rights defenders and volunteers are known for their "feet washing" tradition: as migrants arrive to Trieste after having walked barefoot for miles, in dire conditions, their feet are often bleeding and in need of medical treatment. Lorena Fornasir and Gian Andrea Franchi frequently cross the border and provide basic assistance, such as food and clothes, to migrants stuck at the Croatian border and in informal camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the early morning of 23 March 2021, Italian police raided the house of migrant rights defenders Lorena Fornasir and Gian Andrea Franchi. During the raid, the police confiscated their mobile phones and laptops, as well as the account ledgers for their organisation La Linea d'Ombra and other materials. The search is believed to be related to the investigation opened against Gian Andrea Franchi on charges of 'aiding and abetting illegal immigration' under Article 12 of the decree n. 286, of the 1998 Immigration Act. According to the information provided to the migrant rights defender Gian Andrea Franchi, he is being charged in relation to sheltering a migrant couple and their two sons for one night in his home, and then driving them to the train station the following day.

This is the first time Lorena Fornasir and Gian Andrea Franchi have been targeted for their human rights work in a police investigation. They are among the organisers of the initiative "Un ponte di corpi" (Bridge of bodies), a solidarity march in various parts of Italy to call for open borders and the respect of migrants' rights. The march is due to take place on 6 March 2021. Migrant rights defender Lorena Fornasir also intends to travel to Serbia to march with a group of twelve Serbian women migrant rights defenders.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the police raid on the home of migrant rights defenders Lorena Fornasir and Gian Andrea Franchi, as well as the charges brought against Gian Andrea Franchi, as it believes they are being targeted as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the promotion and protection of the rights of migrants and refugees.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Italy to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against migrant rights defender Gian Andrea Franchi as it is believed that they are solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Return all items and documents confiscated during the raid of Gian Andrea Franchi and Lorena Fornasir's house, as they are manifestly not linked to any criminal activity;

3. Guarantee in all circumstances that the migrant rights organisation "La Linea d'Ombra" are able to carry out their legitimate migrant rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment;

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