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Suriname: Impunity at the root of new abuses

While the shadow of unresolved past human rights violations continues to haunt Suriname, some new abuses are being committed by security forces, Amnesty International said today.

The organization today launched a new report detailing human rights concerns in Suriname and putting forward recommendations for the authorities to bring their law and practices into line with international human rights standards. The report is based on a submission made by Amnesty International to the United Nations' Human Rights Committee as it examined Suriname's human rights record in October 2002. Suriname has promised to submit its report to the Committee in upcoming months, and the Committee's recommendations to the government of Suriname on improving its compliance with international human rights norms are expected before the end of 2003.

"While some progress has been made in investigating the summary killing of 15 people in 1982," Amnesty International said, noting for example the December 2002 exhumations of the victims' bodies as part of a judicial investigation, "impunity remains the norm for the serious human rights violations committed during Suriname's military rule."

The organization highlighted the case of the 1986 massacre in Moiwana, where at least 35 people -- mostly women and children -- were killed by government troops in the context of a counter-insurgency operation. The case is now reportedly pending before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights after the Suriname government failed to comply with recommendations by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights with regard to investigating it.

"Impunity is at the root of new abuses, as it sends a dangerous message that those responsible for human rights violations will not be held accountable," Amnesty International said. "Addressing past violations will help Suriname in eradicating current human rights abuses as well."

Human rights concerns in today's Suriname include several killings by police in disputed circumstances, some alleged beatings and other forms of ill-treatment during arrest and detention, poor prison conditions -- often reportedly amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment -- and shortcomings in the justice system that have contributed to alarming levels of pre-trial detention.

"Key to resolving past and present human rights violations is the full, impartial and independent investigation of all reports of human rights abuses by police and security officers, to bring those

responsible to justice," Amnesty International said.

"The Suriname authorities should also undertake urgent reforms of the justice and prison systems to ensure that they comply with international standards on effective remedy for victims of violations and the treatment of people in detention," the organization added.

Amnesty International also urged the Suriname government to take steps to join the growing number of countries worldwide that have abolished the death penalty.

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