

Guyana: two men to be hanged after unfair trial

The decision to schedule the execution of two men who were denied a fair trial is a flagrant breach of Guyana's obligations under international law, Amnesty International said today.

The executions by hanging of Abdool Saleem Yasseen and Noel Thomas have been scheduled for Monday 13 September despite a ruling of the (United Nations) Human Rights Committee not to execute them.

"The government of Guyana has an obligation to comply with the Committee's ruling," Amnesty International said, calling on the government of Guyana to stop the hanging of these two men.

"If the government hangs these two men despite the Committee's ruling, it will seriously undermine the international system for human rights protection," the organization added.

The Human Rights Committee ruled in March 1998 that the fundamental rights of the two men -- including the right to a fair trial -- had been violated in the course of proceedings against them. The Committee decided that the violations were so severe that it recommended the release of the two men.

In particular, the Committee found that the conditions of detention violated the two men's right to be treated with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. Mr Yasseen was not allowed legal representation for the first four days of his trial and police diaries and notebooks which may have contained evidence in their favour went missing, which impeded the preparation of their defence.

Background

Abdool Saleem Yasseen and Noel Thomas are convicted of the 1987 murder of Kaleem Yasseen, half brother of Abdool Saleem Yasseen.

The Human Rights Committee is the international human rights body which monitors states compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and can consider petitions from individuals who seek protection of their fundamental human rights when the state has failed to provide remedy for human rights violations.

In December 1998, the government of Guyana, withdrew from the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and re-acceded with a clause prohibiting the Human Rights Committee from considering petitions brought by people under sentence of death. The government is still obliged to comply with rulings on petition filed with the Committee before the withdrawal took effect.

Michael Archer and Peter Adams were the last people to be hanged in Guyana in August 1997.

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