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Bahamas: Government to hang two more in violation of international obligations

The government of the Bahamas has dealt another blow to the inter-American system of human rights protection by scheduling the hangings of two men for Tuesday 10 August 1999, despite the fact that their petitions are pending before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Amnesty International said

“In recent years a number of Caribbean governments, including the Bahamas, have deliberately set about undermining and disrespecting the inter-American system for the sole purpose of executing people. It is obvious that the government of the Bahamas no longer intends to fulfil its international human rights obligations on this issue,” the human rights organisation added.

The men, John Higgs and David Mitchell, petitioned the IACHR claiming that they have been subjected to human rights abuses during the course of proceeding against them. For example John Higgs claims, in his petition, that he was subjected to a mock execution in 1997. If the IACHR decides that their claims are valid it can recommend that the government commute their death sentences.

The government has scheduled these executions based on a ruling last year by a national court that executions could be carried out if the IACHR had not issued a decision on petitions within 18 months of them being filed. Both men’s petitions have been pending before the IACHR for more than 18 months.

“This ruling by the national court does not override the government obligation to stay the executions until the IACHR has issued its decision,” Amnesty International said, calling on the government not to execute John Higgs and David Mitchell when the IACHR may yet rule that their internationally protected rights were violated and that their sentences should therefore be commuted.

Background

John Higgs was convicted in August 1996 and David Mitchell was convicted in November 1994 of unrelated murders.

The last people executed in the Bahamas were Trevor Fisher and Richard Woods, in October 1998. They were both executed despite the fact that their petitions were still pending before the IACHR. The IACHR wrote to the government on the day before the executions stating that it would issue its decision on their petitions within two weeks. ENDS.../

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