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Jamaica: Public Security in inner cities - Facts and Figures

Killings

Jamaica has one of the highest rates of homicide and police killings in the Americas.

In 2007, around 1,500 people were victims of criminal murder and 272 were killed by the police – a record high representing more than 15 per cent of the total of killings in that year (Jamaican Constabulary Police).

In 2006, 1,355 people were victims of criminal murder and 229 were killed by the police (Office of the Commissioner of Police and Bureau of Special Investigations).

In 2005, 1,674 people were victims of criminal murder and 202 were killed by the police (Jamaican Constabulary Police).

In the 1990s 50 per cent of homicides were committed with guns. This rose to 61 per cent in 2000 and around 75 per cent in 2005 (Office of the Police Commissioner).

The main victims of homicide and police killings in Jamaica are people living in extremely poor overcrowded inner-cities. Between 30% and 45% of the population of Kingston Metropolitan Region (KMR) live in these communities

Policing

The main body responsible for policing in Jamaica is the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF).

Given that the police are required to minimize damage and injury and preserve human life, it is expected that more people would be injured than killed during policing operations. However, between 2000 and 2007, the Jamaican Constabulary Force killed 1,422 people and injured 1,115.

Police officers trying to make improvements in respect for human rights and to support reform face numerous obstacles, even threats to their life.

Impunity for police killings

There are two government bodies in charge of investigations of killings by the police in Jamaica, the Bureau of Special Investigations (BSI) and the Police Public Complaints Authority (PPCA).

The number of murders investigated and solved by the police is extremely low. Prosecution and conviction rates are also extremely poor. According to official data, during 2005 the 36.5 per cent of recorded murders were investigated and resulted in a suspect being named and referred to Director of Public Prosecutions. For drug-related murders this percentage fell to an astonishing 0 per cent and for gang-related murders the clear-

up rate was 27.2 per cent.

Investigations into cases of fatal shootings in disputed circumstances by members of the police are wholly inadequate. They are compromised by a number of flaws and obstacles, including destruction or damage to evidence at the scene of the crime, a lack of resources (especially forensic and ballistic expertise), a lack of transparency, inadequate powers to investigate and to implement recommendations, and serious delays and inefficiencies.

Life in the inner-city communities

Gang members represent no more than 5 per cent of the population of inner-city communities in Jamaica.

In 2001, more than 60 per cent of those living in inner-city communities did not have an indoor tap providing safe drinking water. A fifth of residents of Western Kingston ghettos still had to use pit latrines and 23.7 per cent had to share toilet facilities with other families (University of West Indies).

In 2007, unemployment in Jamaica was running at 35% In some inner-city areas, however, unemployment was as high as 57 per cent.

Among Caribbean countries, Jamaica ranks second from the bottom in terms of the UN Human Development Index. Only Haiti has a lower score.

STORIES

On the evening of Friday, 27 July 2007, 18-year-old Ravin Thompson was talking to his aunt Pinky at her house in inner-city Kingston when two jeeps with four soldiers and one police officer in each arrived. The officers opened fire while chasing a young man who was running away and then ran into Pinky's house. The young man escaped unharmed but Ravin was shot in the shoulder and arm by the officers.

Pinky asked the officers to take Ravin to the hospital and insisted in going with him in the jeep. Pinky said that while on the road to the hospital, a soldier pushed her out of the jeep. When she managed to get to the hospital, Ravin was dead. The autopsy later revealed that Ravin had four gunshot wounds.

Pinky and others present at the shooting stated that they were certain Ravin had only been injured in the arm and shoulder and that he was murdered in the jeep, before arriving at the hospital. The police recorded the incident as a "shoot-out". The Police Public Complaints Authority and the Bureau of Special Investigations initiated investigations but to Amnesty International's knowledge no officer has been charged in connection to Ravin's death.

"If you have a gun you are not safe because bad men attack men who they know have a gun. If you don't have a gun you are still not safe, because anyone can come and kill you, including the police. And even if you didn't do anything you are not safe, because if someone close to you did something to the gangs and they can not find him they will come and find you." Woman from garrison community, Kingston

"When the 'war' was happening we couldn't drink clean water because we needed to go to the next community to pick up the clean water from the tanks, but we couldn't cross to that section because it was too dangerous, the gang there saw anyone coming from this community as a threat to them... At night we had to sleep on the floor, all of us, the children the granma, all of us; covered by the mattress because sometimes the shots can go through the house and kill us."

Woman from inner-city community, Kingston, October 2007.

"The person that the gang wanted lived over to the side and they wanted him to take side with them and he denied because we wanted the community to be one. So because he didn't take side they burnt down his house, destroyed everything he had, he backed off and they came back and murdered his son and his mother."

Young men from inner-city community in Kingston, October 2007