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Jamaica: the killing of the Braeton Seven: it is time for concrete actions

One year after the Coroner's Court verdict on the police killing of seven young men in Braeton -- on 14 March 2001-- the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has yet to announce a decision on whether the officers involved are to be charged with any offence.

"Enough time has passed to evaluate the overwhelming evidence that the seven were extrajudicially executed," Amnesty International said today, "this seems to be another example of the authorities' unwillingness to prosecute police officers for unlawful killings."

Previously, the Director of Public Prosecutions had publicly stated he would make a decision once he had the depositions from the Coroner's Court. These were supplied to him at the end of June 2003, and would have provided little, if any, new information on the case, yet no decision has been forthcoming.

"The office of the Director of Public Prosecutions appears to be suffering from paralysis in the case of the Braeton Seven, as so often happens in cases of alleged unlawful killings by police officers. Even the urging of the Attorney General to make a decision or his own freely given commitments to a time frame do not produce any action," Amnesty International added.

The inexcusable delay in this case is in sharp contrast to the reaction in that of other high profile crimes. In April 2001, one month after the killing of the Braeton Seven, attorney Shirley Playfair was brutally slain. Those responsible had been identified, charged, tried, convicted and imprisoned by 10 April 2003. In Braeton, it has not even been decided whether charges are to be brought.

"The contrast between Braeton and other high profile killings like that of Shirley Playfair speaks volumes about the authorities' willingness to see police officers accused of unlawful killings stand trial." Amnesty International said "It also reinforces the suspicion that there is lack of political will to hold the police to account."

Despite an average of 140 killings by police officers every year -- many of them in circumstances strongly suggesting extrajudicial executions -- not one police officer has been convicted of a murder committed while on duty since 1999.

Amnesty International urges the Director of Public Prosecutions to immediately announce the prosecution of the officers responsible for the killing of the Braeton Seven.

"This incident has caused debate and uncertainty in Jamaican society. There is ample evidence of unlawful police action to present before a jury. It is time to remove the uncertainty and to forcefully present that evidence to a jury of Jamaican citizens." Amnesty International concluded.

BACKGROUND

The Braeton Seven -- aged between 15 and 20 -- were killed by police officers on 14 March 2001. The police claim to have come under "heavy fire" from the seven, but members of the local community stated that they were killed one at a time after being captured by the police. The accusations of unlawful killings were supported by strong evidence at the crime scene.

On 3 October 2002, the jury at Coroner's Court Inquiry into the killing of the Braeton Seven returned a split decision (6-4) that no one was criminally responsible for the deaths of the seven. However, the jury had not heard much of the vital evidence that the police were lying after a flawed legal process.

The Jamaican authorities continually refuse to bring police officers accused of unlawful killings to account. The charging of officers is almost unheard of and trials even rarer.

For more information on the Braeton Seven, please see: "[Jamaica: The killing of the Braeton Seven: A justice system on trial](#)"

Public Document

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