

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Jamaica / UK: Communities in the Crossfire -- debate on gun violence and arms control**

On October 16th, Amnesty International UK will be hosting a public debate on armed violence in Jamaica and the United Kingdom as part of a series of events in support of its new "Control Arms" campaign.

Detective Superintendent John Coles, Head of the UK Metropolitan Police's Operation Trident, together with Lucy Cope from Mothers Against Guns, Yvonne Sobers from 'Families Against State Terrorism' (FAST) and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office will debate issues relating to arms misuse and share solutions from a range of different perspectives.

"The global arms trade is dangerously unregulated, and allows weapons to reach repressive governments, human rights abusers and criminals," Amnesty International said. "Every day, millions of men, women, and children live in fear of armed violence. Every minute, one of them is killed."

"Every government in the world has a responsibility to control arms. Civil society, police and governments need to work proactively and effectively together to address the problem of arms at every level" Amnesty International stressed.

Both Jamaica and the UK have been affected by armed violence.

739 murders are reported to have taken place so far this year in Jamaica. A large proportion of these constituted reprisal killings, gang-related and domestic incidents. Jamaican media estimate that firearms were used in around 75% of the murders committed in the first three months of this year. Jamaica also has an alarming rate of lethal police shootings; in 2002 at least 133 people died in fatal shootings involving the police.

Recent Home Office figures revealed a 35% reported increase in gun crime in England and Wales in the past year. There were 9,974 incidents involving firearms in the 12 months to April 2002 - a rise from 7,362 over the previous year.

"Governments across the globe need to improve community safety by reducing illegal arms in circulation, building relationships and trust between opposing communities and between communities and the police, and delivering civic education about community safety to counter cultures of violence." Amnesty International stressed.

The UK Government is engaged in a major programme of assistance to the Jamaica

Constabulary Force. Amnesty International has called on the UK and Jamaican authorities to provide meaningful information to the public about the human rights content of the training and assistance given to the police. This includes monitoring procedures to prevent firearms and other potentially lethal equipment from being given to police officers who are likely to commit unlawful killings or commit unwarranted injuries.

"The real 'weapons of mass destruction' -- small arms -- continue to proliferate, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of civilian lives. From the gangs of Kingston, Rio de Janeiro, and Los Angeles, to civil wars and armed rebellions, it is conventional arms that are used to do the killing. The time to act is now."

### **Background Information**

Lucy Cope's 22 year-old son Damian Cope was shot and killed on 29 July 2002. Since his death, Lucy has become a leading anti-firearms campaigner, forming the powerful nationwide organisation Mothers Against Guns. The group has had a major influence on Government policy and won several victories in its campaign for tougher gun control legislation.

Yvonne Sobers's 22 year-old cousin Andre Morris was shot and killed by police in Jamaica in August 2001. Yvonne chairs Families Against State Terrorism (FAST) which campaigns for police accountability in Jamaica.

Detective Chief Superintendent John Coles heads the UK Metropolitan Police's "Operation Trident" unit; a special unit established in 1998 to target gun crime within the black community in London with a focus on drug-related shootings.

**"Communities in the Crossfire" -- Institute for Contemporary Arts (ICA) on 17th October 2003, 6:30 p.m. Tickets: 020 7930 3647.**

**For more information on "Control Arms" Campaign, please see: [www.controlarms.org](http://www.controlarms.org)**

Public Document

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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