

26 May 2000

Further information on UA 101/00 (AMR 38/03/00, 28 April 2000) - Deaths in Prison and new concerns: Fear of Torture/ill-treatment, Medical care, Prison conditions.

JAMAICA Over 300 prisoners in St Catherine's District Prison, Spanish Town

Three hundred inmates in St Catherine's District Prison, Spanish Town, have reportedly been severely beaten and at least two inmates are alleged to have been shot. Amnesty International is deeply concerned for their safety.

The attacks apparently began on 21 May and lasted several days. Soldiers and prison wardens reportedly beat the inmates with batons, rifles, baseball bats, irons and electric wire. Inmates suffered fractures to hands, ribs, feet and skulls, and had teeth knocked out.

Injured prisoners were apparently denied medical attention until the Head of Medical Services in the prison publicly condemned the incident. Several inmates are now reported to be in hospital but it is not clear whether all the injured have received medical attention.

Soldiers and wardens have allegedly continued beating and harassing inmates since these attacks were publicised on 25 May.

Reports as to what led to the original mass beating vary. It is believed that a number of inmates barricaded themselves inside their cells and threw the contents of their slop buckets at soldiers and wardens searching for contraband items. Tension between prisoners & soldiers is reported to be high after complaints that food was inedible or even withheld. (On 11 March 2000, some 1,100 prisoners at St Catherine's District Prison and Kingston General Penitentiary suffered acute diarrhoea caused by food served in both prisons.) Inmates has also complained about being confined to their cells for extended periods.

During the attacks wardens reportedly targeted those inmates known to be supportive of the head of Correctional Services, Colonel John Prescod. Colonel Prescod has reportedly ordered an internal investigation into whether "the force that was used was necessary and appropriate."

Inmates are allegedly also being denied visits from friends and relatives and their mail is being withheld.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed its concerns regarding alleged excessive use of force, in some cases appearing to amount to extrajudicial executions; excessive force during cell searches; prison conditions and other ill-treatment in St. Catherine's prison and other prisons in Jamaica. In December 1993, Amnesty International called for an inquiry into deaths and ill-treatment of prisoners in St. Catherine's prison.

Soldiers have been manning the prison since around 800 wardens went on unofficial strike in January 2000 in protest against the reappointment of Colonel John Prescod as Head of Corrections. They were later indicted. Their anger stemmed

in part from his decision in 1997 to distribute condoms throughout prisons. This led to rioting, in which 17 inmates were killed, allegedly because they were thought to be gay.

Since then Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of ill-treatment in both St. Catherine's and the General Penitentiary, as well as of the failure of guards to protect inmates from inmate-upon-inmate violence, in contravention of international standards.

Conditions in Jamaica's prisons amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and fall well below international minimum standards on prisons. Overcrowding is severe and conditions unsanitary.

The Jamaican constitution guarantees all citizens the right to life, liberty, security of the person; the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life; the right not to be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading punishment or other treatment.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or in your own language urging that:

- immediate steps be taken to ensure that inmates are protected from further violence; and to ensure that inmates making complaints are protected from physical and other reprisals by soldiers or warders;
- that all those injured receive immediate, medical attention;
- that a full, independent inquiry into the allegations take place, with the findings and recommendations made public within a reasonable period of time and with those responsible brought to justice;
- that warders and soldiers alleged to have been involved in the beatings should be transferred from the prison where these took place while the case is being investigated;
- that policies and practice regarding the use of force and conditions in prison be immediately reviewed, to ensure conformance with Jamaica's obligations as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the American Convention and to ensure adherence to relevant international standards, including the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

APPEALS TO:

The Hon K.D. Knight
 Minister of National Security and Justice
 Ministry of National Security and Justice
 12th Floor, 12 Ocean Boulevard
 Kingston Mall
 JAMAICA

Salutation: Dear Minister
Fax: + 1 876 922 6950/5986

Lt. Col John Prescod
 Head Correctional Services Department
 5-7 Kings Street
 Kingston
 JAMAICA

Salutation: Dear Commissioner
Fax: + 1 876 967 2268

and to diplomatic representatives of Jamaica accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after **7 July 2000**.

The Rt. hon. P.J. Patterson
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
Jamaica House
1 Devon Road
Kingston 6
JAMAICA

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Fax: + 1 876 929 0005