

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL MEDIA BRIEFING

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EMBARGO: 25 October at 14:00Hs GMT (10:00am in the Dominican Republic)

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES BY POLICE FACTS AND FIGURES

GENERAL INFORMATION

Dominican Republic Population: 10.2 million (UN, 2010).

VIOLENT CRIME

In the past decade, levels of violent crime have soared in the Dominican Republic, largely as a result of an increase in drug trafficking, a proliferation of firearms and growing social inequality.

The local homicide rate went from 13 per 100,000 of the population in 1991 to 25.01 in 2010 -- the Pan-American Health Organisation considers the "normal" rate to be 5 per 100,000 (Mayra Brea de Cabral and Office of the Prosecutor General).

Over half of homicides are committed in the course of other crimes, such as robbery or drug trafficking in urban areas.

58.1 per cent of all homicide victims in 2009 were men under 34 years old (Office of the Prosecutor General, 2010).

In 65.4 per cent of homicides committed in 2010, the victim was shot (Office of the Prosecutor General, 2010).

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES BY POLICE

Between January and July 2011, 154 people were killed by the police in the Dominican Republic according to the Office of the Prosecutor General -- showing an increase in comparison to 125 over the same period in 2010.

NUMBER OF HOMICIDES 2005 – 2010				
Year	Number of homicides	Number of people killed by the police (Prosecutor)	Number of people killed by the police (national police)	Percentage of people killed by the police (calculated using figures from the Office of the Prosecutor General)
2005	2403	437	417	18.1%
2006	2144	295	296	13.7%
2007	2111	345	344	16.3%
2008	2394	455	599	19%
2009	2375	346	443	14.5%
2010	2472	260	268	10%

Source: Office of the Prosecutor General and National Police

NUMBER OF PEOPLE INJURED BY THE NATIONAL POLICE				
Year	2007	2008	2009	2010
Number of people injured by the police	1055	1297	1025	977

Total number of violent injuries	5437	5163	5088	5865
Police inflicted injuries as a percentage all violent injuries	19.4%	25.1%	20.1%	16.6%

Source: National Police

POLICE FORCE

Low salaries are generally held to be one of the main contributing factors to widespread police corruption.

The lowest ranking officers, who represent about 45 per cent of the force, earn around 5,300 pesos (approximately US\$140) per month. The minimum wage set down in law for workers in private security companies is 8,356 pesos (US\$221) (Ministry of Labor, 2010).

62 police officers were violently killed in 2010, up from 56 in 2009 and 52 in 2008 (National Police, 2011).

12 of the 52 police officers killed between January and November 2010 died in the line of duty. The rest died in other circumstances – for example, as victims of violent crime, in personal disputes, or in the course of committing crimes themselves – or in circumstances that could not be determined (Listín Diario, 2010).

BARRIERS TO JUSTICE

Killings by the police continue to be categorized in the official statistics in ways that suggest a degree of implicit justification.

In 2005, all killings by police were classified by the National Police and the Office of the Prosecutor General as “exchanges of gunfire”; in 2006 they were categorized as “deaths by the National Police in the line of duty”; in 2007 and 2008, they were called “legal actions”; and since 2009 they have been described as “police actions”.

Of the 79 reported killings by the police in the National District between September 2008 and July 2010, 24 were the subject of official complaints. In 13 of those 24 cases, courts had delivered decisions by 31 July 2010, including eight convictions. The remaining 55 cases, about which no formal complaints were lodged, appear not to have been the subject of investigation by either the police or prosecutors. (Office of the National District Prosecutor)

In the great majority of cases, even when police officers are convicted of unlawful killings and sentenced to pay compensation to the victim’s families, the compensation is not actually paid by the officers or by the National Police.

CASOS

FREDDY MORENO LORENZO

On 11 April 2011, Freddy Moreno Lorenzo was sick in bed with his two-year-old son at his home in Haina, San Cristóbal Province, when four police officers entered his house and shot him twice.

Hearing the gunshots, his sister-in-law, who was downstairs in the same building, came out and saw that Freddy was injured but still alive and was being dragged down the stairs by the officers and put into a police car.

The officers took Freddy to the Haina hospital morgue. His aunt, a doctor at the hospital, was heading towards the morgue when she heard a gunshot coming from inside. As she was about to enter, she saw three police officers coming out.

The aunt recognized one of the men as the officer who had arrested Freddy on 29 March 2011 on suspicion of possessing an illegal firearm. Freddy had been released on 1 April 2011 without charge.

Members of his family reported that during his detention Freddy had been beaten repeatedly and that officers had put an onion in his mouth and a plastic bag put over his head.

Freddy's family spoke to the media about his killing and submitted a formal complaint to the Prosecutor of San Cristóbal. However, according to the family and the lawyer, no investigation has been initiated.

Amnesty International has received no response from the Prosecutor to its request for information about progress in the case.

Following the death of Freddy Moreno, his aunt had noticed the same police officer passing regularly by her house holding his firearm. She and other family members believe that this may have been an attempt to intimidate them because they reported the killing. Another member of the family was approached by an individual who encouraged them to drop the complaint.

Note to Editors

An Amnesty International delegation will be in the Dominican Republic between 24 and 30 October.

Javier Zúñiga, Special Adviser and Chiara Liguori, Researcher on the Dominican Republic, will be available for interviews in English, Spanish, French and Italian.

A copy of the report “Shut up if you don't want to be killed: Human Rights violations by the police in the Dominican Republic” will be available from 25 October at 14:00Hs GMT on www.amnesty.org.

Photos and a video are available upon request.

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