

AI Index: PRE01/332/2012  
09 July 2012

## **Dominican Republic: Police must respect the decisions of the judiciary**

The Dominican Republic's National Police Force must respect the decisions of the judiciary and must, at all costs, refrain from putting pressure on the courts. The country's authorities must also commence an in-depth reform of the police force without delay, Amnesty International today said.

In an incident that took place in San Francisco de Macorís on 5 July, around 50 police officers entered the Palace of Justice and removed an officer being held on suspicion of murder from his cell, transferring him back to a police station.

Hours earlier, police officers had been demonstrating on the city's streets in protest at the judicial decision to hold the police officer on remand.

"The Dominican Republic's authorities must send a clear and simple message that no-one is above the law, and must ensure that the judiciary is protected from all pressure and is able to conduct its work with complete independence," said Javier Zúñiga, Amnesty International's special advisor.

National police authorities and local sources stated that the "released" police officer was at risk of reprisals from the victim's family and the local population.

"The police can and must take measures to ensure the safety of any prisoner at risk, including detained police officers, without altering the course of justice," said Javier Zúñiga.

"It is very positive to note that the Chief of Police has already condemned these events and has ordered an investigation but, if a repetition of this situation is to be prevented, an in-depth reform of the police force is required along with the creation of independent mechanisms and institutions for investigating police abuses."

This incident confirms that the reintroduction of police courts, as anticipated in the National Police Bill, will not ensure the greater accountability of the national police force.

"The National Police needs to be under the effective control of the executive, legislative and judicial powers. The immediate appointment and empowerment of the Ombudsman to conduct an independent investigation into its actions would be a considerable step in the right direction in terms of placing the National Police Force under external control."

A number of journalists covering the incidents reported suffering threats and physical abuse from police officers who were protesting at the imprisonment of their colleague.

The Chief of Police criticised the actions of the officers and appointed the Inspector General and Director of Legal Affairs to investigate the events. Over the weekend, the Chief of Police met with local

communities and authorities from San Francisco de Macorís and informed them that 25 officers had been held for questioning.

Puro Enmanuel Díaz López died on 3 June in San Francisco de Macorís during an alleged exchange of fire with police under circumstances that have yet to be clarified.

At the start of July, Judge Fidelina Ramirez, from the Judicial Office of the Permanent Care Services (Oficina Judicial de Servicios de Atención Permanente) in Duarte Province's Palace of Justice, ruled that Officer Marino Alfonso Torres, who admitted responsibility for the death of Díaz López, should be held on remand for three months.

Amnesty International's investigation has revealed that members of the National Police Force commit numerous human rights violations every year, including unlawful murders, torture and other ill-treatment, plus arbitrary arrests. Two cases of alleged forced disappearance have also been noted since 2009.