

PUBLIC

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UA 339/04 Fear for safety/unlawful killings

HAITI Prisoners at National Penitentiary in Port-au-Prince

A prison riot on the night of 1 December left 10 prisoners dead and around 40 injured, according to official figures, but inmates have claimed that many more died, and that guards were "executing" prisoners. Visits to the prison have been severely restricted, making the true situation very difficult to assess. Prisoners who have spoken to journalists are feared to be at risk of reprisals from prison guards.

The riot took place at the National Penitentiary, which holds over 1,000 detainees, in the capital, Port-au-Prince. Officials claim that prisoners who did not want to be transferred to other facilities broke out of their cells, set fire to mattresses and used bricks, kitchen utensils and water pipes as weapons against prison guards and the police who were called to the scene. Some of the dead prisoners had been shot, and others stabbed, according to Haitian National Police officials, who gave no further information about the circumstances in which the men had died.

Two prisoners and one hospital worker have contradicted the official version of events, saying they saw many more than 10 corpses. One of these witnesses, a prisoner released two days after the riot, told a journalist he had seen the police open fire on the detainees, take prisoners out of their cells and force them into a passageway to execute them methodically. He said prison guards had beaten him and warned him not to talk about what he had seen. He is now in hiding.

The director of the national police announced on 6 December that there would be an investigation into the riot. However, he gave no details, and three weeks after the riot no official information has been made public, not even the list of casualties. This means that prisoners' families still do not know whether their relatives are alive or not.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French, English or your own language:

- urging the authorities to order an independent and thorough judicial investigation into the killings at the National Penitentiary on 1 December, and bring those responsible to justice;
- expressing concern at reports that prison guards have beaten and threatened witnesses to the killings, and asking for all such witnesses to be fully protected from any reprisals;
- calling for detainees to be given access to lawyers, their families and any medical assistance they may require;
- reminding the authorities of their need to ensure that all military police and prison guards are properly trained in accordance with international standards on the use of force and treatment of detainees, and are provided with the conditions and training to perform their duties in such a way as to ensure the safety of both detainees and themselves.

APPEALS TO: (please note that fax numbers can be extremely difficult to get through to)

National Police Director
Monsieur Léon Charles
Directeur Général de la Police Nationale d'Haïti
Grand Quartier général de la Police
12 rue Oscar Pacot,

Port-au-Prince, Haïti
Fax: + 509 245 7374
Salutation: Monsieur le Directeur

Public prosecutor
Monsieur Jean Pierre Daniel Audain
Commissaire du Gouvernement près le Tribunal de première instance de Port au Prince
Parquet de Port-au-Prince
Port au Prince, Haïti
Salutation: Monsieur le Commissaire du Gouvernement

COPIES TO:

Prime Minister
Monsieur Gérard Latortue
Premier Ministre
Ministre de l'Intérieure
Villa d'Accueil
Delmas 60
Musseau, Port-au-Prince, Haiti
Fax: + 509 249 5561
Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre

Justice Minister
Monsieur Bernard Gousse
Ministre de la Justice et de la Sécurité Publique
Ministère de la Justice
19 Avenue Charles Summer
Port-au-Prince, Haïti
Fax: + 509 245 0474
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

UN Special Representative
Mr Juan Gabriel Valdés
Special Representative of the Secretary-General
United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
387, avenue John Brown
Port-au-Prince, Haïti
Fax: + 509 244 3512
Salutation: Dear Mr Valdés

Mr David Beer
Police Commissioner
United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
387, avenue John Brown
Port-au-Prince, Haiti
Fax: + 509 244 9366
Salutation: Dear Mr Beer

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 31 January 2005.