

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Jamaica: Amnesty International mourns loss of leading human rights defender**

Amnesty International today mourns the loss of Brian Williamson, brutally murdered on 9 June 2004, and urges that a thorough investigation be conducted into his death.

"Brian Williamson was a courageous individual prepared to speak out for one of the most marginalized and persecuted communities in Jamaica: the gay and lesbian community. The loss of such a fearless champion of human rights is to be regretted; he will be sorely missed". Amnesty International said.

The police have initially concluded that the motive for the murder was robbery due to the reported removal of a safe. Amnesty International urges the investigating authorities to keep an open mind as to the motive behind this killing.

"There remains a strong possibility that Brian Williamson's profile as a gay man and advocate of homosexual rights made him a target for those with homophobic views. The taking of money or other items may have been an afterthought by the perpetrators of the killing with the primary motivation for the murder being hatred of homosexuals." Amnesty International said.

The possibility exists that Brian Williamson was killed because of his sexuality and his public statements advocating the rights of homosexuals and lesbians. Amnesty International views the targeting of those who advocate human rights as a threat to the protection and promotion of all human rights. The authorities must ensure that this murder is fully and impartially investigated.

Amnesty International regrets the tragic daily loss of life in Jamaica and has regularly spoken out against the violence committed by criminals. Every murder is an affront to human rights. When the victim is someone who worked to protect the rights of others, the killing is particularly disturbing.

Brian Williamson was a founder member of the Jamaican Forum for Lesbians all-Sexuals and Gays (J-FLAG), and one of the few individuals prepared to speak publicly about matters concerning the homosexual community.

Jamaica suffers from an appalling level of homophobia and J-FLAG is regularly subjected to verbal threats from members of the public.

Reports of members of the public allegedly laughing and welcoming the news of this death because of the individual's homosexuality is disturbing.

"All murders in Jamaica must be condemned regardless of the individual's race, ethnic background, political beliefs or sexual orientation".

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