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Jamaica: Alleged extrajudicial killings by the army must be fully investigated

The killing of two people during the current state of emergency bear all the hallmarks of extrajudicial executions, said Piers Bannister, Amnesty International's Jamaican researcher today. The organization is calling upon the authorities to fully and impartially investigate these deaths.

"In a meeting in March 2003, the Chief of Staff of the Jamaican Defence Force assured an Amnesty International delegation that human rights abuses by his soldiers would not be tolerated and that all allegations of such would be thoroughly investigated. We are calling upon the army's commanding officer to make good on that statement," Mr Bannister said.

On 19 September 2004, members of the Jamaican Defence Force killed community activist Sandra Sewell, and Gayon Alcott, a 20-year-old footballer. The killings took place in August Town, St. Andrew.

Members of the community who claimed to have witnessed the killings alleged that soldiers approached Alcott because he was smoking marijuana and shot him in the stomach. Soldiers then shot him again as he attempted to flee. Sandra Sewell was allegedly shot as she sought protection from the gunfire behind a pole.

"That these killings took place during a declared state of emergency is of great concern to Amnesty International. States have the right to remove certain civil liberties during times of emergency, but international law is clear -- the right to life cannot be removed by states under any circumstances," Mr Bannister said.

The Jamaican Government declared a month long state of emergency on 10 September in reaction to the approaching hurricane "Ivan".

These killings come at a time when the security forces had been widely praised for their commitment and dedication to duty during hurricane "Ivan". Amnesty International regrets that, once again, the actions of a few state agents may have brought discredit to all who serve the Jamaican people in a security role.

Members of the community of August Town demonstrated against the killing

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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