

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Jamaica: Worldwide forensic expert to observe autopsies of August Town killings**

Derrick Pounder, a Professor of Forensic Medicine at the University of Dundee, will tomorrow be observing, on behalf of Amnesty International, the autopsies of Sandra Sewell and Gayon Alcott.

On 19 September 2004, members of the Jamaican Defence Force allegedly killed community activist Sandra Sewell, and Gayon Alcott, a 20-year-old footballer, in August Town, St. Andrew. Members of the community claiming to be eye witnesses reportedly stated that soldiers approached Alcott because he was smoking marijuana and shot him in the stomach. As he attempted to flee the fire, soldiers shot him again. A soldier is alleged to have shot at Sandra Sewell deliberately as she sought protection from the gunfire.

"The killing of Sandra and Gayon during the current state of emergency are the latest in a series of killings committed by members of the security forces this year. They bear all the hallmarks of extrajudicial executions and are of grave concern," said Olivia Streater, Amnesty International's Jamaica researcher.

"Despite promises to reform investigations into killings by both the Jamaica Constabulary Force and the Jamaica Defence Force, these remain grossly inadequate. Endemic impunity remains the norm," said Ms Streater. "Citizens will continue to live in fear until the authorities take effective action to demonstrate that no-one is above the law."

Amnesty International is particularly concerned that the killings were allegedly committed by members of the army. In previous years, the vast majority of killings by the security forces have been committed by police officers.

Amnesty International has called upon the authorities to fully and impartially investigate the deaths. Four Jamaican organizations have also called on the Jamaican Government to request the assistance of the United Kingdom's Scotland Yard in investigating the killings.

The background to these and other killings by members of the security forces is a spiralling crime situation. Over 1,000 people have been murdered in Jamaica so far this year.

"Amnesty International regrets that Jamaica continues to suffer from high levels of violence and calls on all sections of society to work together to address crime. However, the crime situation cannot be

used to justify unlawful killings by the security forces, or inadequate investigation of these by the authorities" Ms. Streater concluded.

### **Background Information**

Following a request for assistance from the families of Sewell and Alcott, Professor Pounder will be working at the request of, and acting as a consultant to, Amnesty International. He will be observing whether the autopsies are carried out in conformity with the principles embodied in the United Nations Manual on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions (New York 1991).

Professor Pounder has headed the University of Dundee's Department of Forensic Medicine since 1987. Holding specialist qualifications in pathology from the UK, Ireland Australia and Hong Kong, he has also worked in forensic pathology in the Republic of Ireland, Australia and Canada. Professor Pounder provides forensic pathology services to local prosecutors in East Scotland and trains forensic pathologists, local police forces and nurses in the UK and overseas. He has acted as a consultant to inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations including the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), the OSCE project in Kosovo and the United Nations. Professor Pounder is currently engaged in a collaborative training programme in South Africa to strengthen the investigation of violent crimes against women and children including rape and child molestation. Professor Pounder has investigated allegations of extrajudicial executions in Turkey, Israel, South Africa, Azerbaijan, Tunisia, former Yugoslavia, Kenya and Peru and has previously worked for Amnesty in Israel, Jamaica and South Africa.

At least 9 police officers have been charged with murder this year. In 2003 at least 113 people were killed by members of the Jamaica Constabulary Force.

**For the University of Dundee's Department of Forensic Medicine, see [www.dundee.ac.uk/forensicmedicine](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/forensicmedicine).**

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