

URGENT ACTION

POLITICAL ACTIVIST KILLED AHEAD OF ELECTIONS

The killing of a political activist in Guyana during the pre-electoral period fuels fear that further violence and limitations to freedom of expression may occur.

Political activist **Courtney Crum-Ewing** was killed on 10 March in the East Bank Demerara neighbourhood of the Guyanese capital shortly after he had called on local residents through a bullhorn to vote in the upcoming legislative elections, scheduled on 11 May, in order to oust the incumbent ruling party. The autopsy showed that Courtney Crum-Ewing was shot five times, with three shots to the head and another at point blank range from behind his neck. Police initially said a car with four men drove up and discharged the shots at him before driving off. A few days later, the police arrested two men but on 16 March announced that they were most probably going to be cleared of the crime.

Courtney Crum-Ewing had staged a protest for several weeks outside the office of the Attorney General between November and December 2014 calling for his resignation following allegations of corruption and threats to journalists. In recent months, Courtney Crum-Ewing had reported receiving threats from members of the ruling party and filed two complaints with the police. After his killing, his mother stated that those reports had not been adequately dealt with.

Several members of both the opposition and the ruling party have condemned the killing of Courtney Crum-Ewing and urged the police to thoroughly investigate it. However, given the sensitive electoral context and the police's poor record in solving high-profile murder cases, there are fears that this killing might exacerbate political tensions, spark further violence and have a chilling effect on freedom of expression.

Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to carry out a thorough, independent, impartial and timely investigation into the killing and bring those responsible to justice;
- Calling on them to guarantee a favourable context and peaceful atmosphere for the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression, association and assembly and other civil and political rights;
- Urging the authorities to provide adequate protection to political activists, journalists and human rights defenders who might be at risk as a result of the exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 28 APRIL 2015 TO:

Prime Minister

Hon Samuel A A Hinds
Office of the Prime Minister
Wight's Lane, Kingston
Georgetown, Guyana
Fax: +592 226 7573

Email: opm@networksgy.com

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Police Commissioner

Seelall Persaud
Police Headquarters
Young St., Eve Leary
Georgetown, Guyana
Fax: +592 123 3456

Email: info@guyanapoliceforce.gy

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

And copies to:

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs

Mohabir Anil Nandall
95 Carmichael Street
Georgetown, Guyana
Fax: +592 227 5419

Email: anilnandall@hotmail.com

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The political situation in Guyana has become tense since November 2014, when ahead of a no-confidence vote against his government the President took the rare constitutional measure of “proroguing” Parliament, which effectively suspended it. The President justified this measure as necessary “to allow the parties in Parliament additional opportunities to talk” and resolve the pressing national issues that were confronting them. The opposition criticized this measure as anti-democratic and as a means to avoid calling elections. On 24 February 2015 the President finally announced the dissolution of Parliament and called for elections on 11 May.

Politics in Guyana have traditionally reinforced an ethnic divide, with one major party drawing support from the Afro-descendent population and the other from the descendants of East Indians. Though Guyanese people of different ethnic groups generally maintain harmonious relations, each had in the past fallen victim to the other during instances of racially-motivated violence, which has left painful memories and underlying tensions. On 14 March, the Guyanese Human Rights Association expressed concerns that “the murder of Courtney Crum-Ewing might also be seen as the beginning of a process of manipulating ethnic insecurity aimed at people voting for ‘race’, rather than for their political convictions. These tactics have distorted Guyanese elections for the past sixty years”.

Courtney Crum-Ewing had started protesting against the Attorney General after the publication of a recording in which the Attorney General told journalists of the independent news outlet *Kaieteur News* that if they continued linking the government to corruption scandals they might suffer an attack. On 18 November 2014, the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights issued a request for precautionary measures on behalf of three *Kaieteur* news journalists, requesting that the State take measures to protect the lives of the journalists, according to their wishes, and to investigate the incidents. In December 2014, the Director of Public Prosecutions announced that there was no evidence to charge the Attorney General.

Defamation is a criminal offense in Guyana that can be punished with up to two years in prison, and public officials have used civil libel suits towards journalists who had put forward allegations of wrong-doing. In 2006, *Kaieteur News* was the target of a purported attack in which four employees were shot dead. Although several people were charged for the attack, none of them were convicted.

Name: Courtney Crum-Ewing

Gender m/f: m

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