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Bahamas: Amnesty International seeks clarifications to the authorities on migration reforms

Amnesty International sent a communication on 17 March to the Bahamian authorities requesting detailed information about the current migration reforms amid allegations that these might be leading to human rights violations and enhancing discrimination in the country.

Since September 2014 the government of The Bahamas has announced a series of new policies and reforms to the immigration system, including new requirements for migrants residing in the country, such as holding a residence permit for children to be able to enrol in schools.

The precise content of these reforms have yet to be made public despite the fact that the authorities have already been implementing some of them creating uncertainty about its details and arbitrariness in its implementation.

On September 2014, for example, the government announced, that by 1 November everyone living in the Bahamas will be requested to hold a passport of their nationality. This was done within a short timeframe and without any published policy nor information campaign targeting the affected populations. Consequently, according to the authorities, this resulted at that time in the arrest of 77 people in the island of New Providence. Other sources estimated the arrests to be at several hundreds, mainly of which are Haitians or of Bahamians of Haitian descent.

Transparency should be paramount in order to prevent human rights to be affected. In a spirit of collaboration with the Bahamian authorities, Amnesty International therefore requests to receive clarifications to a number of questions on the migration reforms, specifically in view of understanding how the government of The Bahamas is planning to implement the new measures in a manner compatible with its international human rights obligations.

Background information

On 13 February 2015, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) requested The Bahamas to adopt precautionary measures in favour of the persons

held in immigration detention at Carmichael Road Detention Centre, in The Bahamas. The request for precautionary measures states that the beneficiaries are at risk because they are allegedly in inhumane conditions of detention, with extreme overcrowding and lack of appropriate medical attention that could affect their right to life and physical integrity.

On 20 March 2015, a thematic hearing will be held at the IACHR about the situation of human rights of migrants in The Bahamas following repeated allegations of human rights violations and concerns.