

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 70/97

Death Penalty

16 May 1997

JAMAICA

Samuel LINDSAY  
Henry MCKOY  
Lansford JAMES

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According to information received by Amnesty International, three prisoners on death row at St. Catherine District Prison, in Jamaica, Samuel Lindsay and Lansford James have been moved to the condemned cell and may be executed in the immediate future. If carried out, these executions will be the first in Jamaica since 1988.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty unconditionally as a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment as proclaimed in Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The last two prisoners to be executed in Jamaica were Stanford Dinnal and Nathan Foster, on 18 February 1988. The method of execution is death by hanging. In Jamaica, only the Governor General has the authority to grant commutations.

There is a growing tendency of Caribbean governments to speed up executions, arguing that it will deter the high level of crime and violence. According to press reports, violent crime has risen steadily in Jamaica. According to a police report, between January 1996 and 11 December 1996, 979 murders and 1,425 shootings were reported. There were 780 murders in 1995.

The Minister of National Security and Justice, K. D. Knight, announced in the Jamaican Parliament on 29 October 1996 that a new crime-fighting plan would be implemented due to the high level of crime and violence in the country. He also said that a limit of nine months will be placed on appeals on behalf of people on death row to be made to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC) and to the United Nations. However, if the JCPC and the UN fail to make any decision within the time limit the executions will take place. The Minister of National Security and Justice also announced before the Parliament on 29 October 1996 that "These horrendous crimes [by death row criminals] have added significantly to the fear of crime currently permeating every stratum of society".

In a four-day meeting in St. Kitts, in October 1996, Attorneys General and Ministers responsible for Legal Affairs of the Caribbean Community countries (CARICOM), discussed the total abolition of appeals to the JCPC. Three countries, Barbados, Guyana and Jamaica, have agreed to the abolition of appeals to the JCPC and the establishment of a Caribbean Court of Criminal Appeals.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals by fax, telegram, express or airmail letters in English or in your own language, including as many of the following points as possible:**

- expressing concern at reports that Samuel Lindsay, Henry McKoy and Landsford James have been moved to the condemned cell, signalling the imminent resumption of executions in Jamaica;
- urging that these and all other pending death sentences be commuted;
- expressing deep concern at the intention to resume the use of the death penalty in Jamaica after nearly nine years without executions, and urging the Governor General not to be responsible for taking such a retrograde step;
- noting that detailed research in many countries has produced no evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishment and pointing to the worldwide trend towards the abolition of the death penalty;
- expressing sympathy for the victims of violent crime and their relatives.

**Other points which may be added:**

- the death penalty is brutalizing to all who are involved in the process;
- it denies the widely accepted principle of rehabilitating the offender;
- it does not necessarily alleviate the suffering caused to the victims of crime.

**APPEALS TO:**

Governor General

His Excellency The Most Honourable  
Sir Howard Cooke, ON, GCMG, GCVO, CD  
Office of the Governor General  
Kings House, Hope Road  
Kingston 10, Jamaica

**Phone: + 1 879 927 6424 / 6143**

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**Telegrams: Governor-General, Kingston, Jamaica**

**Salutation: Dear Governor General**

**COPIES TO:**

Prime Minister

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and to diplomatic representatives of Jamaica accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Please check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 June 1997.