

UA 101/00

JAMAICA Deaths in prison

Two prisoners in maximum security prisons have been murdered by other inmates in the last few days in Kingston. One was decapitated and the other stabbed 17 times. Eleven other prisoners have been murdered in Jamaican prisons so far this year.

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed its long-term concerns to the Jamaican authorities about the inadequate measures to protect inmates from violence and at appalling prison conditions. In August 1997, inmates rioted in St. Catherine's District Prison and Kingston's General Penitentiary after Commissioner of Correction John Prescod announced plans to distribute condoms in the hope of stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS among inmates and guards. The riots broke out after prison guards went on unofficial strike for three days, interpreting the proposal as implying that some of them had homosexual relations with prisoners.

During the riots, 16 inmates were murdered after fellow prisoners accused them of being homosexual. A further 40 were injured. According to media reports, the police and army officers employed to quell the rioting were insufficiently trained and equipped to restore order.

Inmate killings continued throughout 1998 and 1999 and appear to have increased in 2000.

The present security problems appear to have worsened since many prison wardens were suspended and replaced by soldiers. The suspensions followed unofficial strike action by guards after the government reappointed John Prescod as Commissioner of Corrections for a second term. Numerous guards went on "sick leave" a few days after Prescod's reappointment was announced. When the guards returned to work they were suspended by prison authorities until further notice.

An Amnesty International delegation which visited St Catherine's District Prison in February 2000 observed a staff ratio of approximately four soldiers for every prison guard. The delegation also observed what appeared to be a lax attitude to security in what was an exceedingly rundown and poorly maintained facility.

On 11 March 2000, some 1,100 prisoners at Kingston General Penitentiary and St Catherine's District Prison suffered acute diarrhoea after being fed an unhygienic meal.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Conditions in Jamaica's detention centres fall well below international standards. Prisons are so overcrowded and insanitary that incarceration amounts to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. The two main prisons on the island, St Catherine's District Prison and Kingston General Penitentiary, remain severely overcrowded, having been built for 650 and 850 inmates respectively but currently housing approximately 1225 and 1378.

Amnesty International has received numerous and regular letters from Jamaican prisoners alleging appalling conditions, inadequate medical care and extreme brutality by guards and fellow inmates.

The Jamaican state has a duty to ensure the physical integrity and well-being of those in its custody. It is obliged to protect detainees from violence and serious human rights violations, whether committed by prison officers or fellow prisoners.

Amnesty International's other human rights concerns in Jamaica include: widespread police brutality and police killings in circumstances where lethal force was not justified (also see *The killing of Michael Gayle: authorities yet to hold army or police officers accountable*, AI index AMR 38/02/00, published May 2000); and the use of the death penalty (although the last execution was in 1988, approximately 43 prisoners remain under sentence of death and death warrants have been issued in the recent past).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- stating that you are aware of, and sympathetic to, the limited financial and human resources available to the Jamaican authorities to deal with the countries social and economic problems;
- stating, however, that it is the Jamaican state's duty and obligation to ensure that all those held in custody are treated humanely, are not subjected to cruel inhuman or degrading treatment, and are shielded from attack by other inmates to the fullest extent possible;
- asking the authorities to ensure that all staff responsible for the security of Jamaican prisoners are adequately trained, equipped and educated as to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and other similar relevant international standards.

APPEALS TO:

The Rt Hon. P. J. Patterson
 Prime Minister
 Office of the Prime Minister
 Jamaica House
 1 Devon Rd
 Kingston 6
 Jamaica

Salutation:Dear Prime Minister
Fax: + 1 876 929 0005

Lt. Col John Prescod
 Commissioner of Corrections
 Correctional Services
 5-7 Kings St.
 Kingston
 Jamaica

Salutation:Dear Commissioner
Fax: + 1 876 967 2268

The Hon K. D. Knight
 Minister of National Security and Justice
 Ministry of National Security and Justice
 12th Floor, 12 Ocean Boulevard
 Kingston Mall
 Jamaica

Salutation: Dear Minister
Fax: + 1 876 922 6950/5986

and to diplomatic representatives of Jamaica accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 June 2000.