

Public Statement

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Jamaica: Suspected extrajudicial executions - government must act  
now

On 14 March 2001, the Jamaica Constabulary Force killed seven young men, three of whom were under the age of 18, during an alleged arrest attempt. Amnesty International believes that the circumstances surrounding the shootings strongly suggest the deaths amounted to extrajudicial executions. The organization is calling on the Jamaican government to immediately investigate these killings in accordance with international standards and bring to justice anyone found guilty of human rights violations. The organization is also calling for an urgent investigation to be carried out into the activities of the specialist Crime Management Unit, whose members carried out the killings.

Police statements that the men died after firing "heavily" on police, following an early morning raid by at least 40 police officers, have been contradicted by eyewitness accounts and forensic evidence.

Eyewitness reports suggested that the police induced entry to the house by forcing a young man to knock on the door. According to the testimonies of local residents, four men inside the house and the man who knocked on the door were then taken outside and beaten. All five were then returned inside and shot one by one. The head of the Crime Management Unit has denied reports that the victims were heard crying out for mercy before being shot. However, the police are also reported to have killed one young man who had gone to the house in response to the cries for help and another man who was walking outside the house on an errand while brushing his teeth. Other members of the community were reportedly kept away from the house at gunpoint.

Amnesty International is extremely concerned that any investigation into these deaths would have been compromised by the actions of the officers involved in the operation who cordoned off the house for around five hours after the shooting. There are reports that the bodies were immediately removed without body bags, shells were removed from the scene and none of the remaining evidence was secured.

In the light of reports that police have systematically contaminated forensic evidence, the authorities must make every effort to ensure that an independent, thorough and prompt investigation is undertaken, with the remaining evidence secured. Independent medical experts must be allowed to observe autopsies unobstructed and measures must be taken to ensure that relatives and witnesses are protected from any possible threats or intimidation.

An initial independent report from the scene of the incident failed to find evidence of bullet holes in other buildings or walls in the vicinity of the house where the men died. This would appear to contradict the police version of events, since their coming under "heavy fire" would most likely lead to clearly visible damage to other buildings.

Time and time again, the Jamaican police kill and injure those they seek to question. For the public to have confidence in the judicial system, those accused of being the perpetrators of crime should be brought before a judge and jury and given a fair trial, not shot dead in the street. The level of killings by the Jamaican Constabulary Force is amongst the highest in the world. This must be addressed by the authorities and the number of deaths reduced.

Amnesty International fears that many of these killings are the result of excessive use of force or constitute extrajudicial executions. Investigations into these deaths appear to be inadequate and fail to meet international standards.

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