

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

22 March 2001

AI Index AMR 38/009/2001 - News Service Nr. 53

Jamaica: No more excuses: Minister of National Security must become engaged in human rights protection

Amnesty International is today calling on the Jamaican Minister of National Security and Justice, K D Knight, to become fully engaged in ensuring that those guilty of human rights violations are brought to justice.

"As the minister responsible for the police force of Jamaica, it is incumbent upon Minister Knight to ensure the investigation into the killing of seven young men in Braeton is thorough and impartial," the organization said.

"It is no longer acceptable for Minister Knight to stay on the sidelines arguing that the process of investigation into human rights violations is independent of his office."

Minister Knight has stated that it is for the jury summoned by the Coroner to determine whether or not there was criminal liability in the Braeton killings.

"To make the correct decision, a jury needs to receive evidence giving an accurate and complete picture of the events, and the Minister must ensure that the jury receives such information," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International's monitoring of investigations into numerous alleged police killings recently has shown that such investigations lack adequate logistical support. This includes failure to carry out timely forensic examinations at the scene of death and incomplete and inadequate post mortems of the victims. The organization has received repeated reports of police intimidating witnesses and removing vital evidence, such as bullet casings.

"The investigations into police abuses are clearly inadequate," Amnesty International said, noting that the mechanisms for such investigations are in place but they are inadequately resourced and their staff appears to lack the will to bring cases to court.

"The time for excuses is over. It is the duty of every Jamaican politician to ensure that all those responsible for human rights violations are brought to justice," the organization said.

*Amnesty International is also extremely concerned at reports of an increasing number of death threats against those involved in defending human rights. These include telephoned death threats to the Secretariat of human rights group *Jamaicans for Justice*, and a threat to murder the talk show host Wilmont Perkins and his staff, and to bomb the radio station that broadcasts his show. The threats are clearly motivated by anger at any effort to ensure a full and fair investigation into the killing of the seven men in Braeton.*

"The authorities in Jamaica must do everything within their power to ensure the safety of human rights activists," Amnesty International said, inviting the authorities to officially condemn those who threaten or harm human rights defenders.

Amnesty International is also urging the government and police force to prioritise the protection of those under threat, both as a measure to preserve their safety and in order to ensure that freedom of expression is upheld in Jamaica.

Background

On 21 March 2001, Minister of National Security and Justice, K D Knight, was quoted as refusing to be "coerced" into "interfering" with the investigation into the killing of the seven men and that the investigation was progressing "in accordance with the law".

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.

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