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Amnesty International Secretary General's open letter to the Government and citizens of Jamaica

Dear people of Jamaica,

I am acutely aware of the discord caused by the recent release of Amnesty International's report on human rights abuses committed by Jamaican police officers.

Discussion and debate are a healthy sign of a vibrant democracy and I am confident this will play a part in Jamaican society finding solutions to the problems the country faces.

However, during the debate, I fear we are forgetting to acknowledge the many areas upon which so many of us agree. Furthermore, the policies of Amnesty International are being misrepresented and misunderstood. As I feel it would be constructive, I would like to take this opportunity to clarify Amnesty International's policies and to summarise where I feel there is agreement around the debate regarding the policing of Jamaica.

As our report acknowledges, there are many professional and dedicated police officers in Jamaica daily risking their safety in order to protect the countries' citizens. The policing of Jamaica is a complex, dangerous and difficult task, and Amnesty International calls upon everyone in Jamaica to support the police in the course of their duties.

In return for the public's support, Jamaica police officers must carry out their duties strictly within the confines of the law. When threatened, police officers should use the minimum amount of force required to protect the safety of themselves and those around them. It is incumbent upon members of the Jamaica Constabulary Force to treat every citizen

of Jamaica with the same respect, regardless of the individuals social standing or wealth.

When human rights violations by police officers occur, it is the duty to the authorities to fully and comprehensively investigate the actions of the officers and to place all the facts before a court of law. No one should be above the law. Police officers accused of violating the human rights of others are entitled to the same fair trial as any other citizen.

Amnesty International acknowledges the terrible suffering caused by brutal and horrific crimes that have tragically become part of Jamaica's everyday life. Our sympathies go out to the victims of violence and their loved ones. We demand that those involved in criminal activities cease their actions. We fully support the efforts of the police force to bring the perpetrators of crime to justice and believe such persons should be punished via the judicial system. Those who rob, rape, murder and commit other indefensible acts are guilty of violating the human rights of their fellow citizens. Such people do not have Amnesty International's support when committing such acts. However, no person, regardless of whatever vile acts they have committed, is without human rights. Human rights protect the worst amongst us, as well as the best in society, which is why they protect all of us.

Amnesty International does not advocate for any political party or seek to influence how citizens will vote in any country, including Jamaica. It is for the people of Jamaica, and them alone, to decide which party is the most appropriate to form the next government.

Amnesty International has a policy of never advocating sanctions, political, economic or cultural, on any country, including Jamaica. The organization believes that human rights are the legitimate concern of the international community, and therefore seeks to engage all governments,

inter-government agencies and others in protecting human rights both within their own country and other nations. In taking its concerns regarding Jamaica to the international community, Amnesty International does not seek to damage the economic interests or standing of Jamaica. We simply request the international community to play a positive role in seeking to protect the human rights of all Jamaican citizens.

Amnesty International does call for other governments to support the Jamaica police in combatting crime by whatever means within their power, be it via aid in training and equipping officers, or other logistical support. However, such aid should be linked to the protection and respect of human rights by the Jamaican Constabulary Force.

The organization also calls upon the Jamaican authorities to implement effective crime prevention strategies, and to care for the victims of crime and the victims of police violence. Such victims are entitled to, and are owed the right, to see justice carried out.

Our report, *Jamaica: Killings and violence by police: How many more victims?* has been repeatedly accused of being “one sided”. The report includes the information supplied to us by the authorities and we have endeavoured throughout the year it took to compile the report to reflect the situation accurately, fairly and acknowledging all the factors affecting the policing of Jamaica. I respectfully request all those interested in this subject to read the report and come to their own conclusions. The report can be found at our website: www.amnesty.org

There is much that is positive about Jamaican society and I believe the country can and will overcome the problems that adversely affect those living on the island. But the many social ills that harm the country's well-being must be confronted while respecting the human rights of

everyone in society. The debate around such issues as crime, human rights, poverty etc. must be informed and respectful if effective answers to such problems are to be devised.

Amnesty International will remain committed to contributing to such a debate and to protecting the human rights of all Jamaicans.

Yours sincerely,

*Pierre Sané
Secretary General*

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