

UA 201/01

Fear for**JAMAICA. Hilaire Sobers, human rights activist, journalist, lawyer**

Journalist Hilaire Sobers has received a death threat, which appears to come from a supporter of the government. He is an outspoken critic of the government's human rights record, and Amnesty International is seriously concerned for his safety.

Hilaire Sobers, who is also a human rights activist and lawyer, writes a weekly column on human rights for the *Jamaica Observer*. He has been highly critical of the authorities' failure to prevent extrajudicial executions by the security forces and other abuses. On 7 August a letter was delivered to the newspaper's offices, which contained a picture of a gunman raping and shooting Hilaire Sobers with an M16 rifle. It referred to Hilaire Sobers's work and said, "*When we ready wi a go shoot all a oonu like Perkins, Wignal and all oonu lawyer in a oonu rass hole... Fire in a yu batty.*" (When we are ready we are going to shoot all of you like Perkins [a renowned radio journalist], Wignal [a journalist working for the *Jamaica Observer*] and all of you lawyers in the arsehole... Fire in your arse). It also made explicit reference to Amnesty International: "*Help! Amnesty. Help Goat Face Gomes. Wan gunman a dig out mi batty hole wid him M16. Wey de insane Sane deh.*" (Help! Amnesty. Help Goat Face Gomes [Carolyn Gomes, Director of Jamaicans for Justice, a human rights non-governmental organisation]. Gunmen want to shoot me in the arse with an M16...Where's the insane Mr. Sané? (Former Amnesty International Secretary General Pierre Sané visited Jamaica in September 2000 and April 2001.)

Hilaire Sobers reported the letter to the police that day. The writer of the letter appears to be a supporter of the ruling People's National Party (PNP), and suggested that Mr Sobers was working in tandem with the opposition JLP party, accusing JLP leader Edward Seaga of being "de biggest teif an gunman in de world".

The day before the death threat was delivered, Sobers and representatives from a human rights organisation, FAST, had gone to Hunts Bay Police Station in the capital, Kingston, to provide legal assistance to several young men who had been arrested. Police refused to say why the men had been arrested. When a FAST member said, "Why is this man acting like a fool?", a police officer grabbed her, put her under arrest and charged her with using abusive language and obstructing an officer. She was released a few minutes later on the orders of a senior officer. Police threatened to hit another FAST member and then threw him out of the police station. The mother of one of the young men who had been arrested had come to the police station to find out why he had been arrested and try to see him: police hit her with their rifle butts and threw her out.

Amnesty International has been receiving increasing numbers of reports of members of local NGOs campaigning on human rights being threatened and intimidated, and is concerned at inflammatory comments by members of the government and others in authority. At a recent funeral of a police officer, the Minister for National Justice and Security criticised human rights groups for defending the rights of criminals, implying that they sympathised with gunmen. Amnesty International fears that such comments may undermine freedom of expression. For further information, see *JAMAICA: Killings and Violence by Police: How many more victims?*

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:**

- expressing concern that journalist Hilaire Sobers received a death threat on 7 August;
- urging the authorities to provide him with adequate protection, so he can continue his legitimate work for the defence and promotion of human rights;
- calling for an immediate, impartial and full investigation into the death threat, and asking for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging the government to adhere to its obligation to guarantee the protection of human rights defenders so that they can carry out their legitimate work without fear of threats or reprisals, as laid out in United Nations and Organisation of American States declarations;
- asking the authorities to publicly recognise the importance and legitimacy of the work of human rights activists.

**APPEALS TO:**

The Hon. K.D. Knight  
Minister for National Security and Justice  
Mutual Life Building  
North Tower  
2 Oxford Road  
PO Box 472  
Kingston 5  
JAMAICA  
West Indies

**Fax: + 1 876 906 1713**

**Telegrams:KD Knight, Minister for National Security and Justice, 2 Oxford Road, Kingston, JAMAICA**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

Francis A. Forbes, CD, LL.B.  
Commissioner of Police  
Office of the Commissioner  
101-105 Old Hope Road  
Kingston 6  
JAMAICA  
West Indies

**Fax: + 1 876 927 7516**

**Telegrams:Francis Forbes, Commissioner of Police, 101-105 Old Hope Road, Kingston, Jamaica**

**Salutation:Dear Commissioner**

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 20 September 2001.