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## **Jamaica: Amnesty International to send observer to Commission of Inquiry into the July violence in West Kingston**

*Amnesty International today announced that it will send an observer to the Commission of Inquiry into the violence that left at least 27 people -- including two members of the security forces -- dead in West Kingston in July this year.*

*"The Commission of Inquiry is of vital importance if Jamaica is to stop the cycle of political violence that has left so many of its citizens dead in recent years. Amnesty International believes that international scrutiny of the Commission is appropriate given the allegations of human rights abuses committed by the security forces in their attempt to restore order in the area," the organization said.*

*During the tragic events of July 2001, Amnesty International received reports of the torture and arbitrary detention of young men in the West Kingston area. Reports included allegations of young men being forced to lie on the ground for prolonged periods in extreme heat and of members of the security forces firing automatic weapons indiscriminately in heavily populated areas.*

*British barrister Rupert Skilbeck will be representing Amnesty International at the Commission for one week commencing 8 October 2001. This will be the first of a series of observations of the proceedings.*

*Rupert Skilbeck is a member of Bar of England and Wales Human Rights Committee, and has previously observed trials on behalf of Amnesty International in Zambia. He has also worked for the US non-governmental organization the Southern Center for Human Rights and for the European Court of Human Rights. He has published several papers on human rights law and is a practising criminal lawyer.*

### **Background**

*Jamaica has a history of political violence, dating back to the 1970s and the formation of armed gangs with political affiliations. This year, violence with political undertones has been reported since the drive-by shooting in April 2001 of William "Willie Haggart" Moore, of Arnett Gardens (an area affiliated with the ruling People's National Party), which triggered violence in that and surrounding areas, leaving an estimated 41 people dead in the past two months.*

*On Saturday 7 July 2001 members of the Crime Management Unit raided Tivoli Gardens in West Kingston, an area affiliated with the official opposition party, the Jamaican Labour Party, in an operation described as a raid for illegal arms stocks. In May 1997, Tivoli Gardens had already been the scene of similar disturbances. On that occasion, army and police officers were alleged to have discharged thousands of ammunition rounds indiscriminately over two days, following the shooting of a resident of the area by security forces. The disturbances occurred eight months before a general election, at a time of political tension.*

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