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Jamaica: Strong action needed to end human rights violations and impunity

Amnesty International today welcomed the interest shown by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) into the serious human rights situation in Jamaica and called on the Commission to promote a visit the country to assess the situation on-site.

The IACHR held hearings on human rights abuses in Jamaica on 14 November 2001. An Amnesty International delegation, along with members of the human rights group Jamaicans for Justice, presented their concerns to the commission at a meeting held at the IACHR's headquarters in Washington DC.

"It is imperative that the international community takes positive action to help end the escalating rate of lethal killings by police officers; many of which amount to extrajudicial executions," Amnesty International said.

Violations of the American Convention on Human Rights, which Jamaica ratified in 1978, are a regular occurrence. The authorities have consistently failed to take effective measures to address such breaches, in violation of their international obligations.

"Members of the Jamaican Constabulary Force are committing gross violations of human rights with impunity. This situation must be addressed by the international human rights community and the Washington meeting was a vital first step in that process," Amnesty International said.

A number of organizations will be following up the meeting in Washington by presenting the IACHR with petitions on individual cases of human rights violations that have remained unaddressed by the Jamaican authorities.

Background.

In recent years, Amnesty International has highlighted the many police killings that are inadequately investigated by the authorities in order to ascertain whether lethal force was legitimately used. In many cases, overwhelming evidence points to the use of excessive lethal force or extrajudicial executions. The trial of police officers for these abuses is extremely rare. To Amnesty International's knowledge, only three police officers have been tried for human rights abuses since 1999. This, despite numerous credible accusations of gross violations committed by the Jamaican Constabulary Force documented by the organization in recent years.

Jamaica signed the American Convention on Human Rights on 16 September 1977 and ratified it in 7 August 1978. As a state party to the Convention, Jamaica is obliged to implement the Convention's articles. Article 4(1) provides that "Every person has the right to have his life respected. This right shall be protected by law and, in general, from the moment of conception. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life." The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, composed of members elected by state parties to the Organization of American States (OAS), monitors compliance with the Convention.

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