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Trinidad and Tobago violates national and international law by scheduling Anthony Briggs's execution

In scheduling Anthony Briggs to be hanged on 22 June, the authorities of Trinidad and Tobago have once again shamelessly violated international human rights obligations and national courts' rulings, Amnesty International said today.

It is shameful that the authorities are seeking to hang Anthony Briggs when legal redress, including commutation of his death sentence, may be exercised for violations of his human rights.

"The government of Trinidad and Tobago has once again taken steps to erode the system for human rights protection in the region which has been built up over the past 50 years," the human rights organization added.

In March 1999, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) ruled that the state had violated Anthony Briggs's rights guaranteed by the American Convention on Human Rights (American Convention) and recommended that he was entitled to effective remedy including commutation of his sentence.

As a result of the government's failure to comply with its obligation under the American Convention to remedy the violations, on 25 May 1999 the Inter-American Court on Human Rights ordered the government to preserve Anthony Briggs's life "until such time as the Court... issues a decision on the matter." To date, the Inter-American Court on Human Rights has not issued a decision.

The scheduling of the execution also goes against a recent ruling by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (Trinidad and Tobago's highest appeal court, located in London) that executions should be stayed until petitions to international bodies are finally disposed of and the rulings of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court on Human Rights have been considered by the relevant authorities.

Background

Anthony Briggs was convicted with Wenceslaus James of the 1992 murder of Siewdath Ramkissoon, and sentenced to death in June 1996.

Following unsuccessful appeals to the national courts, a petition was filed on behalf of Anthony Briggs with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in October 1997, claiming that his rights guaranteed under the American Convention on Human Rights had been violated.

The IACHR ruled that the state had violated his right to full and free exercise of the rights and freedoms recognized in the American Convention on Human Rights. The IACHR also found that

his right to be tried within a reasonable time or to be released had also been violated, as he had been detained for three years and three months before he was brought to trial.

On 20 May 1999, the government requested that the Inter-American Court on Human Rights discharge an order dated August 1998 to preserve his life. The order was issued when the state tried to execute him while the IACHR was considering his petition. The state's request to discharge the order was opposed by the IACHR on the grounds that the state had failed to remedy the violations of the American Convention contained in its decision.

Dole Chadee, (also known as Nankissoon Boodram), Joey Ramiah, Ramkalawan Singh, Joel Ramsingh, Russell Sankeralli, Bhagwandeem Singh, Clive Thomas, Robin Gopaul and Stephen Eversley were the last people to be hanged in Trinidad and Tobago on 4, 5 and 7 June 1999. Their executions were the first to take place in the country for five years.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on 44 171 413 5566.