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Trinidad and Tobago: not too late to discuss human rights with Amnesty International

Just a few days before the start of the official visit by Amnesty International's Secretary General to the Caribbean to promote human rights, Trinidad and Tobago authorities have given no reply to numerous requests for a meeting, the organization said today.

In the past few months Amnesty International has contacted the Prime Minister and Attorney General on several occasions to seek their participation in face-to-face meetings with Secretary General Pierre Sané. Neither has so far responded to the requests.

"I regret that the government of Trinidad and Tobago has not responded to our requests for a meeting and does not seem willing to engage in an open and constructive debate on human rights issues," said Mr. Sané, who will arrive in Port-of-Spain on Monday 11 September.

"This dialogue is of vital importance to enable the people of Trinidad and Tobago to live free from fear -- the fear of having their fundamental rights violated."

Mr. Sané pointed out that the government of Trinidad and Tobago has shown international leadership by becoming one of the first nations to ratify the treaty establishing International Criminal Court. However there remain some crucial issues to debate, including the weakening of human rights protections available to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This was the result of the country's withdrawal from two key international human rights instruments-- the American Convention on Human Rights and the Optional Protocol of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

"In the past years, I have met with government officials from every part of the globe and engaged in frank and open discussions regarding Amnesty International's concerns in their countries," Mr. Sané said.

"This has proved an extremely valuable channel of communication, giving us both a unique insight into governments' point of view regarding human rights and the opportunity to offer them advice on how to protect and maintain the human rights of their citizens."

Amnesty International is again publicly inviting the government of Trinidad and Tobago to nominate an official with the authority to discuss human rights with the organization.

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