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# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 125/93

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Myanmar - 8 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 111

Yugoslavia/Kosovo - 12 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 117

EJEs and "Disappearances" - 20 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 124

## TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Israel & OT - 5 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 124

Togo - 5 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 111

Council of Europe Summit - 7 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 122

Francophone Summit - 11 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 111

North Korea - 15 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 88/119

Afghanistan - 26 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 124

## FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting - 21-25 October (undecided)

Iran - 3 November (international)

Venezuela - 10 November - SEE NEWS SERVICE 121

Papua New Guinea - 19 November (targeted)

Colombia - 16 March 1993 - SEE NEWS SERVICE 123 + UAs AMR 23/56+57/93

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News Service 125/93

AI INDEX: AMR 49/WU 03/93  
5 OCTOBER 1993

**TRINIDAD & TOBAGO: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGENTLY APPEALS FOR HALT TO TODAY'S EXECUTIONS**

Amnesty International is urgently appealing to the government of Trinidad and Tobago to stop the executions scheduled today of Ramcharan Bickaroo and Robinson LaVende, two of the longest-serving prisoners under sentence of death in the English-speaking Caribbean.

The two men are scheduled to be executed despite the pending result of an appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC) in London which could result in their sentences being commuted. Amnesty International believes that by issuing their death warrants, the government is showing contempt for judicial procedures.

Ramcharan Bickaroo was convicted of murder and sentenced to death on 5 April 1978; his appeal was dismissed in June 1979. No petition for leave to appeal to the JCPC was submitted as lawyers advised there were no grounds of appeal at that stage.

Robinson LaVende was convicted and sentenced for murder on 22 November 1977; his appeal was dismissed in November 1979. It is not clear whether his case was submitted to the JCPC.

A decision is still pending at the JCPC on the case of two Jamaican prisoners under sentence of death who are appealing on the grounds that to execute them would be unconstitutional as it would constitute cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, in view of the time they have spent on death row. The decision of this appeal, due to be issued in the next few weeks, would apply to cases in Trinidad and Tobago and other countries which maintain the JCPC as their final court of appeal.

A final decision is also pending in a case from three prisoners in Trinidad and Tobago arguing similar constitutional claims who were close to execution in November 1992. Bickaroo and LaVende have been under sentence of death for 15 and nearly 16 years respectively, about the same time as the two appellants from Jamaica, and therefore a positive decision in the case would also benefit them.

Furthermore, under the Optional Protocol of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Trinidad and Tobago is a party, prisoners under sentence of death should be given the opportunity to submit their case to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, but Bickaroo and LaVende have not.

There have been no executions in Trinidad and Tobago since 1979. In 1990 a Commission of Inquiry into Capital Punishment submitted a report to President Noor Hassanali recommending among other things that prisoners sentenced to death over 10 years ago should have their sentences commuted to life imprisonment. The government then in power was reported to have accepted the recommendations. A new government, elected in December 1991, was reported to also have accepted this recommendation which would apply to Bickaroo and LaVende.

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