

AI Index: PRE 01/035/2013
22 January 2013

Dominican police officers finally charged in key killings case

A prosecutor in the Dominican Republic has filed charges against five policemen and a naval officer for the murder of two men in 2009, in what Amnesty International called a key case that points to the pressing need for radical police reform in the Caribbean country.

On 19 January the Prosecutor's office in north-western Montecristi province filed the charges against the officers for their responsibility for killing William de Jesús Checo and Cecilio Díaz, who were shot dead on 10 October 2009.

Amnesty International has campaigned for justice for the men's killings, and raised the case in a meeting with the Prosecutor General late last year.

"After more than three years, the decision to formally charge these police officers and move on with legal proceedings is a major advance, and we hope the investigation and prosecution will look into how high up the police chain of command the responsibility lies for these killings," said Javier Zúñiga, Special Adviser to Amnesty International.

"Hopefully the developments in this case will push the Dominican authorities to press forward with the announced comprehensive reform of the National Police force, which is implicated in hundreds of cases of killings and torture every year."

On 10 October 2009, the officers who have now been charged allegedly shot Checo and Díaz dead in Copey, Villa Vásquez in Montecristi province. According to the police, they were both wanted in relation to the kidnapping of Eduardo Baldera Gómez, a young man who had gone missing a month earlier in the north-eastern town of Nagua.

The National Police claimed that the two men died in a shoot-out between gang members and the responding officers, but an investigation launched by the Prosecutor General in November 2009 refuted that claim, concluding that:

"The large number of gunshots fired at both victims and their trajectory indicated that the alleged exchange of gunfire did not take place and that there was intent to kill the two men."

The Dominican authorities have yet to deliver justice in other cases of human rights violations related to the Baldera Gómez abduction – including the disappearance of Juan Almonte on 28 September 2009.

In its recent announcement, the Prosecutor General's office stated that human rights violations by state agents will not be tolerated in the future.

"The announced zero-tolerance policy for human rights violations by Dominican state agents is a very positive break from the past, but the case of William de Jesús Checo and Cecilio Díaz is just one of many examples of why measures must be put in place to prevent human rights violations and ensure the

wholesale reform of the National Police,” said Zúñiga.

Hundreds of people are killed by police violence in the Dominican Republic every year, and justice is either non-existent or slow in coming.

In its October 2011 report, [*“Shut up if you don’t want to be killed”*](#), Amnesty International documented a number of cases of those killed unlawfully by police.

In November 2012, the President appointed yet another commission for the police reform tasked of presenting a proposal for reforming the police, including a draft organic law of the National Police. The President is expected to shortly submit the draft law to the Congress.