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Guyana: Need for immediate inquiry into death squad killings

Amnesty International today urged the President of Guyana to open an immediate inquiry into allegations that a 'death squad' has tortured, "disappeared" and killed dozens of individuals since 2002.

"Serious allegations suggesting that members of the security forces may be involved in illegal killings are currently in the public domain. In the interests of protecting human rights and the security of all Guyanese citizens, the Government must take immediate action to prevent further killings and ensure that the culprits are identified and brought to justice." said Amnesty International.

The Government must send a strong message that it will not tolerate such crimes and must insist upon a full and independent inquiry.

Amnesty International is urging the Government to seek all necessary assistance to help undertake such an investigation. Technical expertise in areas such as pathology, forensic science and ballistics should be sought.

Background

In recent weeks, allegations emerging from a number of different sources of the existence of a death squad have been widely reported in the Guyana's press.

A recent report of the Disciplined Forces Commission, submitted to the National Assembly in December 2003, made reference to the possible existence of a 'phantom' squad. In January 2004, George Bacchus declared that he used to be an informant for the group and accused the Minister of Home Affairs of possible involvement. He also alleged that three men charged with the murder of his brother, Shafeek Bacchus, on 5 January 2004, were members of the death squad.

Two of the three charged are former police officers; one of whom died on 1 February 2004 in disputed circumstances in Georgetown hospital.

Reports have suggested that the death squad was formed following a wave of organized crime in 2002. It allegedly killed suspected criminals, or those with links to known criminals, including several men who escaped from Georgetown prison on 23 February 2002, as well as others. Reports indicate that the bodies of some of those killed have yet to be discovered. Others allegedly bore marks of torture.

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