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Jamaica - Government opens floodgates to executions

Amnesty International today accused the Government of Jamaica of trying to avoid international scrutiny of the human rights of its citizens following its intention to withdraw from the (First) Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the Covenant).

“Jamaica is the first country to ever withdraw from this,” Amnesty International said today. “By withdrawing, the government is denying to Jamaicans whose human rights are violated the right to protection by the Human Rights Committee.”

Under the Protocol individuals who believe that their human rights have been violated by the state can appeal to the Human Rights Committee -- the United Nations (UN) based body which monitors states compliance with the Covenant. The Covenant protects fundamental human rights including the right not to be tortured, the right to life and the right to a fair trial.

The Human Rights Committee has considered many cases from Jamaica and found that the Government has violated the rights of individuals under the Covenant in many cases. Many of the appeals were filed by death row prisoners.

“There are 49 men on Jamaica’s death row. For these Jamaicans the noose is tightening. Death row prisoners risk being arbitrarily executed if they are denied their right of review by the Human Rights Committee,” Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is calling on the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, to take immediate action and urge the Government of Jamaica to reconsider its decision to withdraw from the Protocol.

The only other country to denounce a UN human rights treaty in recent years is North Korea, which withdrew from the Covenant itself in August of this year.
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