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Trinidad and Tobago: Privy Council authorizes hanging which would violate international law

Despite today's ruling of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council the government of Trinidad and Tobago will violate international law if it executes Anthony Briggs, Amnesty International said today.

The Privy Council -- Trinidad and Tobago's highest appeal court, located in London -- ruled that it would not be unconstitutional to hang Anthony Briggs even though the Inter-American Court on Human Rights has ordered the government to preserve his life until it has considered his case.

"By ruling that the government does not have to comply with this order, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC) has undermined the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court and seriously threatens the inter-American system for the protection of human rights which has been created over the past 50 years," Amnesty International said.

"The Inter-American Court -- which has jurisdiction to consider all aspects of this case -- could ultimately order Trinidad and Tobago to commute his death sentence if they find that he has been subjected to human rights violations."

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has already found that Anthony Briggs's fundamental rights -- guaranteed by the American Convention

on Human Rights -- have been violated, and in a report published in March 1999 recommended that the government of Trinidad and Tobago commute his death sentence.

When the government refused to implement this recommendation, the Inter-American Commission called on the Inter-American Court to maintain the Court's order -- made in August 1998 -- to preserve the life of Anthony Briggs.

On 25 May 1999, the Inter-American Court decided to maintain the order "until such time as the Courtissues a decision on the matter."

"The government of Trinidad and Tobago should respect its international legal obligations to the Inter American Court by not issuing a warrant to execute Anthony Briggs while this order is still in place," Amnesty International appealed.

The organisation further urges the government to comply with its obligations under the American Convention to implement the recommendation of the Inter-American Commission to commute Anthony Briggs's death sentence.

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Background

Anthony Briggs was convicted in June 1996 of the 1992 murder of Siewdath Ramkissoon. In August 1998, the Inter-American Court issued an order to preserve Anthony Briggs's life, because the government had issued him an execution warrant while the Inter-American Commission was still considering his petition.

Dole Chadee (also known as Nankissoon Boodram), Joey Ramiah, Ramkalawan Singh, Joel Ramsingh, Russell Sankerali, Bhadwandeem Singh, Clive Thomas, Robin Gopaul and Stephen Eversley were the last people to be hanged on 4, 5 and 7 June 1999. Their executions were the first to take place in the country for five years.

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