

AI INDEX: ASA 12/09/96
24 JUNE 1996

AUSTRALIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SUPPORTS DEATH IN CUSTODY INQUIRY CALL

Amnesty International welcomes last week's recommendation for a judicial inquiry into the death of 18-year-old Stephen Wardle who died within hours of his arrest in an East Perth Police cell in 1988.

The recommendation for a Royal Commission inquiry into the death was made on 19 June by a Legislative Council Select Committee On The Western Australian Police Service.

"It's incredible that Stephen Wardle's death has never been fully investigated -- key evidence under preservation orders of the Coroner was suddenly found to have disappeared when it was required for further investigations," Amnesty International said today.

"We are concerned about what appear to be persistent attempts by police to stop Stephen Wardle's family from campaigning for a thorough investigation into his sudden death."

Since 1993 five or more armed, plain-clothes police carried out several intimidating dawn raids on the family property for petty items such as documents or to check the serial number of a lawn mower for a second time. As one member of the family stated: "They don't come in marked police cars... they bang on the door at 6.30 in the morning, push their way in and immediately separate us".

Amnesty International is calling on the Western Australian Government to grant a fully independent judicial inquiry to investigate not only the circumstances of the death, but also allegations of persistent police harassment and intimidation against relatives of the deceased.

ENDS\