

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: AMR 05/004/2012  
10 December 2012

### **Human Rights Day: civil society from the Caribbean calls for an end to the death penalty**

Today, Human Rights Day, representatives of civil society from the Caribbean are calling on governments in the region to take steps towards ending the death penalty.

The call is made by representatives of non-governmental organizations from the Bahamas, Belize, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as the Greater Caribbean For Life network and Amnesty International.

Executions in the Caribbean are rare, but death sentences continue to be handed down by many Caribbean courts often in violation of international human rights law and standards. Many of the criminal justice systems in English-speaking Caribbean countries are struggling with caseloads that far exceed their capacity. Inadequate legal representation, lack of witness protection programmes and poor forensic services are also common. These deficiencies, allied to the police's lack of adequate training, resources and poor investigative capacity as well as corruption often result in violations of due process or the death penalty being imposed on prisoners suffering from mental disabilities.

Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago still retain the mandatory death penalty for murder, even if international and regional human rights bodies have found the automatic and mandatory imposition of the death penalty to be an arbitrary deprivation of life as it does not allow the possibility of taking into account the defendant's personal circumstances or the circumstances of the particular crime.

While the world is moving away from this punishment, with more than two-thirds of the countries having abolished the death penalty in law or practice, a number of governments in the region have recently attempted to pass legislation aimed at facilitating a return to hanging in response to high levels of violent crime.

The United States of America continues to be the only executioner in the Americas, but even there positive signs have shown that the country is progressively turning against the use of this punishment, most recently with a moratorium on executions declared in the state of Oregon and abolition of the death penalty in Connecticut.

The death penalty violates the right to life as enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Governments in the English-speaking Caribbean continue to cling to their belief that the death penalty is a key answer to public security concerns, despite the lack of evidence that the death penalty helps reduce crime. While deeply sympathizing with the victims of violent crime, the undersigned organizations hold that the death penalty does not make societies safer.

On Human Rights Day, civil society is calling on the authorities of Caribbean countries which retain capital punishment to implement effective and constructive solutions to criminal justice issues and to remove the death penalty once and for all from the law books.

#### **Signed by**

Bahamas Human Rights Network  
Belize Human Rights Commission

Selwyn Strachan (Grenada)  
Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (Guatemala)  
African Cultural Development Association (Guyana)  
Commonground (Guyana)  
Guyana Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities  
Guyana Human Rights Association  
Guyana Region of the Society of Jesus  
Guyana Society for the Blind  
Help & Shelter (Guyana)  
Red Thread (Guyana)  
Sisters of Mercy (Guyana)  
Ursuline Sisters in Guyana  
Vilvoorden Women's Organisation (Guyana)  
Independent Jamaica Council for Human Rights  
Puerto Rican Coalition against the Death Penalty  
Puerto Rico Bar Association  
Catholic Commission for Social Justice (Trinidad and Tobago)  
RED Initiatives (Trinidad and Tobago)  
Doh Do Death (Trinidad and Tobago)  
Amnesty International  
Greater Caribbean For Life