

Belize: continuing human rights violations

The government of Belize must take action to investigate and put an end to alleged human rights violations by police, Amnesty International said today releasing a comprehensive report on human rights in Belize.

"The problem of excessive use of force by police appears to be particularly serious in Belize City and in the areas near the Guatemalan border," the organization added. In 1999 local human rights organizations documented more than 30 cases of police brutality.

Torture by police is believed to have caused the death in custody of detainee Daniel Tillett in the Belize Police Headquarters in Belmopan on 21 September 1999. A post mortem examination revealed injuries -- including a ruptured liver and fractured skull -- suggesting severe ill-treatment in police custody.

Amnesty International is urging the authorities in Belize to investigate all reports of police brutality and torture, to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice and to ensure that security forces comply at all times with international standards on the use of force.

Amnesty International's report also focusses on the extremely poor conditions in Belize's main detention centre, Hattieville Rehabilitation Centre.

There are reports of corporal punishment -- which is provided for in Belize's Prisons Rule -- being used in a recent incident against at least two inmates.

"Inflicting corporal punishment in prisons serves no justifiable penal purpose and has a brutalising effect on all involved," Amnesty

International added. "Such practice flouts international standards on the treatment of prisoners and should be abolished."

"Belize's human rights record is also marred by the existence in its legal system of the death penalty," the organization said. Although no executions have been carried out since 1985, there are currently 10 people on death row in Belize. Three of them were sentenced in 1999.

"In line with the international trend towards the abolition of the death penalty Belize should refrain from imposing further death sentences and commute the outstanding ones with a view to eradicate completely this inherently cruel punishment."

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