

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 32/002/2003 (Public)
News Service No: 241
23 October 2003

Embargo Date: 23 October 2003 15:00 GMT

Grenada: 20 years on, time to remedy unfair trial of Grenada 17

Amnesty International is calling on the Grenadian Government to redress the injustice of the unfair trial inflicted on 17 political prisoners known as the Grenada 17, as the 20th anniversary of their detention approaches.

The organization is urging the Grenadian authorities to establish an independent judicial review of the convictions of the Grenada 17, detained in the context of the invasion of the island by US forces, in the light of the irregularities documented.

"If the Grenadian authorities prove unwilling to put into place an independent judicial review of their convictions, the only alternative action that would go in accordance with international human rights standards would be the release of the Grenada 17," Amnesty International said.

In its new report, *"The Grenada 17: Last of the cold war prisoners?"*, Amnesty International presents its analysis of the trial and other legal proceedings against the 17, where the organization has discovered blatant violations of the rights to have a fair hearing.

"Amnesty International believes that the Grenada 17 cannot continue to be incarcerated on the grounds of a conviction that was obtained via a process that was in gross violation of international standards governing fair trials"

Some of the violations of human rights standards include:

gross irregularities in procedures used to establish a jury pool -- including the appointment of a registrant who until the day before her appointment was a member of the prosecution team;
inclusion in the prosecution's case against the 17 of numerous confessions that may have been extracted under torture without adequate investigation to ensure that the statements had been freely given;
denying the defendants access to written materials relating to the events leading up to the killings, which were allegedly taken by the invading US forces
failure of the Court of Appeal to produce a written brief of its denial of the seventeen's appeal, thereby denying their lawyers access to the criteria used by the judges in upholding the convictions -- information vital to any new appeal.

Moreover, before the trial, the Grenadian Court of Appeal ruled that despite the trial-court

being unconstitutional it was required as a "court of necessity".

"It appears right from the outset that the Grenada 17 were not going to have their rights to a fair trial protected," Amnesty International said.

The Prime Minister of Grenada has recently stated that the fate of the Grenada 17 should be determined by public opinion.

"Whether the 17 continue to be imprisoned after an unfair trial should not be a matter of public opinion. Amnesty International urges the Prime Minister of Grenada to be guided by human rights principles and to immediately rectify the denial of a basic fair trial rights to the Grenada 17".

"The review should be empowered to recommend all appropriate judicial measures to remedy any proven irregularities, including the quashing of convictions deemed to be unsafe," Amnesty International added.

"To continue to imprison them on the basis of such a fatally flawed facts-finding procedure would be to continue the injustice." Amnesty International concluded.

Background Information

In October, a violent confrontation involving high-ranking members of the ruling New Jewel Movement, army officers and others, led to the killing of the Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and some of his supporters. Six days later, the United States of America led an invasion of Grenada, citing concerns around the safety of its citizens on the islands among other reasons.

Numerous people were detained by the invading forces in connection with the October killings. Eventually Bernard Coard, Phyllis Coard, Hudson Austin, Ewart Layne, Selwyn Strachan, Liam James, Leon Cornwall, Dave Bartholomew, John Ventour, Colville McBarnette, Christopher Stroude, Lester Redhead, Calistus Bernard, Cecil Prime, Andy Mitchell, Vincent Joseph, and Cosmos Richardson, known as the Grenada 17, were tried and convicted.

The trial took place in an atmosphere of hostility towards the 17 and resulted in 14 being sentenced to death and 3 to long terms of imprisonment. The death sentences were commuted a few years later.

The organization has monitored their incarceration and legal processing since the tragic events of October 1983. Amnesty International does not take a position on the actual guilt or innocence of the Grenada 17 but does believe that the unfairness of the legal proceedings against them must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

For a full copy of the report "*The Grenada 17: Last of the cold war prisoners?*", please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engamr320012003>

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>