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GUYANA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNS RESUMPTION OF HANGINGS

Amnesty International was appalled to learn that the first hanging since September 1990 has taken place in Guyana today, following the government's January announcement that hangings were to resume.

Ayube Kahn, who was arrested for the murder of a schoolboy while trying to steal his bicycle in 1990, was executed on Monday 12 February 1996, following the issuing of a death warrant a few days earlier. Rockliffe Ross, who had been charged with murder in 1989 and was also issued with a death warrant on the same day as Ayube Kahn, was given a seven-day reprieve.

"While we express the utmost sympathy for the victims of violent crime, the use of the death penalty never serves any valid purpose but merely brutalizes the society which uses it," Amnesty International said.

Death warrants were issued on 1 February for two others, Abdool Saleem Yasseen and Noel Thomas, who received stays of execution pending a constitutional motion arguing that the length of time and conditions on death row amount to "inhuman or degrading treatment". Amnesty International is also concerned about a possible miscarriage of justice in this case. Their appeal continues this week.

There are currently a total of 18 people on death row in Guyana. Amnesty International fears that further death warrants may be issued and that the executions of the three men who have already received them could go ahead. The organization is calling on the Guyana Government to commute all death sentences immediately.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment.

The organization believes that the overwhelming conclusion from many studies on the issue is that there is no evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishment. There is also, as in this case, the appalling risk of executing someone who may be innocent.

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