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Jamaica: Welcome developments: Is an end to police impunity in sight?

Amnesty International today welcomed the recent actions and undertaking by the Jamaican government to strengthen the investigation of police officers involved in fatal shootings.

"The recent actions to help bring about police accountability are positive, welcome and give credibility to the government's statements that they seek to hold police officers to account in Jamaica. However, in the final analysis, there are only two criteria by which success can be judged: a significant drop in the number of those killed by police officers and the trial and conviction of officers for unlawful killings," Amnesty International said today.

In the past three months, the Jamaican government has taken firm steps and made specific commitments to end unlawful killings and police impunity.

The authorities have:

undertaken to improve the autopsies on those killed by the police;
undertaken to lessen the backlog for Coroner's Court inquires into police killings;
made explicit public statements that unlawful killings by police officers will not be tolerated;
publicly requested that the Director of Public Prosecutions make a decision on whether to prosecute members of the Crime Management Unit implicated in the unlawful killing of the Braeton Seven;
sought and received expert assistance from the governments of the UK, USA and Canada with the investigation of the killing of four persons in Crawle by officers from the Crime Management Unit on 7 May 2003; and
disbanded the Crime Management Unit.

The disbandment of the Crime Management Unit -- which has been implicated in numerous abuses of human rights -- is a particularly welcome development. However, mere disbandment of the unit does not go far enough.

"The Crime Management Unit has been implicated in numerous abuses of human rights. While its disbandment is welcomed, for justice to be done the officers involved in the killing of the Braeton Seven and other suspicious killings need to be placed before a court and given a fair trial to determine their responsibility before the law."

Amnesty International wishes to point out that action on high profile cases is only part of the solution.

"The system must work for all, including those cases of police killings that do not attract media attention. Every death must be adequately and impartially investigated. Those officers who used legitimate lethal force must be cleared; those implicated in unlawful killings must be brought before the courts."

While noting that there has not been a single trial of a police officer on a charge of unlawful killings in recent times, Amnesty International nevertheless hopes it has seen the turning of a corner in the fight to see justice for the victims of unlawful police killings in Jamaica.

Amnesty International is also concerned at recent reports that the members of the Crime Management Unit involved in the killings at Crawle have yet to give statements to investigating officers and wish to return to the scene of the killings before doing so.

"Police officers involved in fatal shootings must give statements to investigating officers as soon as is practicably possible after the event while it is fresh in their memory. To allow officers to give statements over 6 weeks after the event gives them time to consult with each other to ensure uniformity of their version and to spot potential flaws in their story if they are lying. It is unacceptable that members of the Crime Management Unit have yet to record their version of the killings at Crawle," Amnesty International added.

Background

Jamaica suffers from an appallingly high level of police killings. In 2002, the police killed 133 people in a population of only 2.6 million. While some of the killings are the result of the legitimate use of lethal force, there is strong evidence that many amounted to extrajudicial executions.

However, the prosecution of police officers on charges relating to unlawful killings is almost unheard of. Despite numerous assurances from the Government and the Director of Public Prosecutions that there is no immunity for police officers implicated in unlawful killings, the authorities have failed to provide any details of officers actually tried, let alone convicted. The last conviction of unlawful killing by a police officer known to Amnesty International was in 1999.

For further information on the situation in Jamaica and details of the killing of Patrick Genius please see [Jamaica: Killings and violence by police: How many more victims?](#) and [Jamaica: The killing of the Braeton Seven - A justice system on trial](#)

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