

JAMAICAResidents of St Ann

According to reports from local human rights activists and the media, residents of St Ann have been subjected to police brutality following the forced removal of squatters from government land. Demonstrations are believed to be ongoing and Amnesty International fears that further clashes between security forces and residents will result in excessive use of force and further police brutality.

A demolition team, escorted by police, reportedly arrived at the "Roaring River" properties between 2 and 6am on 26 June and demolished 28 "structures".

Local residents initially protested peacefully against the demolitions. However, violence occurred, including stone throwing, after the police and firefighters attempted to extinguish a fire started by the protesters.

The police apparently responded by baton charging the crowd, indiscriminately beating demonstrators. Those beaten included the local member of Parliament for the area, Shahine Robinson, who has been quoted as stating "He [the policeman] kept beating me on my side; he knew full well who I was. The police officer was not wearing a number which is totally against all regulations but will prevent him from being identified." Other residents also claimed that police officers were not wearing identification markings, in line with regular reports of police officers not wearing identification numbers in Jamaica, thereby making it difficult to identify officers accused of committing human rights abuses.

Reports also claim that police officers shot live rounds into the air in an attempt to intimidate protesters and indiscriminately fired tear gas, some of which was fired into legal homes near the squatters camp.

A nine-day-old baby girl is currently in hospital after the police allegedly fired tear gas into her home and she was hit by stone, allegedly thrown by a policeman.

The prime minister of Jamaica, P J Patterson, has publically expressed his disapproval of the pre-dawn evictions and has told Parliament that he has ordered State relief to be given to those who are now without homes.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has long-term concerns around policing in Jamaica, a society which undoubtedly suffers from an appalling level of violence. Concerns include the excessive use of force, extrajudicial executions and the use of torture against criminal suspects. For more information please see *Killings and violence by police: How many more victims?* (AMR 38/003/01, published April 2001.)

The Jamaica authorities have acknowledged the problem of police brutality. On 31 May 2001, the Commissioner of Police publically stated: "Far too many policemen are getting involved in situations which clearly display an excessive use of force. Again I say to you, notwithstanding the attitude of some Jamaicans you face daily, you can't beat up citizens and then expect their full cooperation".

However, Amnesty International is gravely concerned that such expressions of concern are not translated into police officers being held to account for committing human rights violations. The trial of police officers on charges of abusing human rights appears to be extremely rare. Amnesty International has made repeated requests to the Jamaican authorities to be informed of charges laid against officers. Although the organization has been informed of statistics relating to the total number of police officers charged with criminal offences such as corruption or theft, the authorities have yet to provide any details of charges relating to human rights abuses.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in or your own language:

- expressing your concern at reports of police brutality against residents of St Ann;
- urging the authorities to ensure that no further instances of police brutality occur;
- recognising that the authorities have a right to remove people who are illegally occupying government land but stating that this must be done within the confines of international law governing the use of force by police;
- expressing concern at reports of police officers not wearing identification numbers thereby making it difficult for victims of police brutality to identify the perpetrator of the abuse and asking what measures are being taken to ensure that police officers always wear identification markings;
- requesting to be kept informed of the outcome of any investigation into the allegations of police brutality in the St Ann's area;
- expressing concern at the general level of police brutality in Jamaica.

APPEALS TO:

The Rt Hon P. J. Patterson, PC, QC, MP,
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
Jamaica House
1 Devon Road
Kingston 6

Fax: + 1 876 929 0005

Telegram: Prime Minister, Jamaica House, Kingston, Jamaica

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

The Honourable K D Knight
Minister of National Security and Justice
Ministry of National Security & Justice
Mutual Life Building
North Tower
2 Oxford Road
Kingston 5
Jamaica

Fax: _ 001 876 906 1713

Salutation: Dear Minister

Francis A. Forbes, CD, LL.B.
Commissioner of Police
Office of the Commissioner
101-105 Old Hope Road

Kingston 6

JAMAICA

Fax 001 876 927 7516

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

and to diplomatic representatives of Jamaica accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 8 August 2001.