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Jamaica must tackle shocking wave of police killings

The killing of 21 people by Jamaican police in just six days must be subject to a thorough inquiry, Amnesty International said as it called on the authorities to mount an effective investigation into recent and past police operations.

Six of the killings took place during a single police operation in Denham Town, West Kingston, on 5 March. A 13 year-old girl died after reportedly being caught up in cross-fire between police and criminal suspects.

45 people have been killed by police in Jamaica so far in 2012, according to press reports.

“The recent wave of police killings in Jamaica is shocking but unfortunately not unprecedented,” said Chiara Liguori, Caribbean researcher at Amnesty International. “The problem is that police continue to enter marginalized inner-city communities as if everyone there was a criminal suspect.”

The last time such levels of police violence were recorded was during the state of emergency in May 2010 in West Kingston, where 76 people were killed over two days during an operation by security forces.

Almost two years on, no one has yet been held responsible for those killings, and an investigation carried out by the Public Defender is still to be concluded.

“If human rights abuses such as police killings go unpunished, it will only open the door for more abuses to take place,” said Chiara Liguori.

Jamaica also has a bad record in terms of holding those responsible to account and providing justice and reparations to victims’ families. Out of more than 2,220 fatal shootings by police recorded between 2000 and 2010, only two officers have been convicted.

Amnesty International acknowledged that the creation of the Independent Commission of Investigations (INDECOM) in August 2010 has been a crucial step towards enhancing investigations of abuses by the security forces.

However, the organization believes authorities in Jamaica must ensure INDECOM is provided with sufficient resources and collaboration from other state agencies to conduct effective investigations that actually lead to justice for the victims.

Amnesty International’s research on police killings in Jamaica found that effective investigations are hampered by a lack of independence in the ballistic and forensic services and by limited resources which often contribute to the lack of justice.

“Faced with another wave of killings by the security forces in West Kingston, the Jamaican authorities

must take decisive steps to fight impunity,” said Chiara Liguori “They should make all needed resources available to ensure a prompt, independent and effective investigation of the recent killings and appoint an independent commission of inquiry to ensure that all human rights violations committed under the state of emergency do not go unpunished.”