

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Jamaica: Government fails relatives of the Braeton Seven - overwhelming evidence of extrajudicial executions ignored**

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Amnesty International said today that following the failure of the Jamaican government to deliver justice in the case of the "Braeton Seven", it would be helping relatives of those killed to take their case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

"Two years ago tomorrow, seven young men lost their lives at the hands of the Jamaican police force. Despite such a large loss of life in a single incident, the investigation into their deaths has been totally inadequate. The evidence overwhelmingly points to the young men having been extrajudicially executed," Amnesty International said today.

"The relatives of the Braeton Seven have seen their quest for answers and justice go unheard by the authorities in Jamaica. It appears that they must look to the international community to continue their fight to find out the truth about how their sons died."

A new report released today, [Jamaica: The Killing of the Braeton Seven - A Justice System on Trial](#), examines the police version of the killing of the seven young men and boys, statements of the local community in Braeton and the subsequent Coroner's Court inquiry.

The report includes the views of experts in ballistics, forensics, firearms and pathology. All the experts consulted were clear and unanimous in their view that the evidence overwhelmingly pointed to the seven being the victims of extrajudicial executions.

"Despite overwhelming evidence that the seven were extrajudicially executed, the authorities have failed to take any effective action to hold those responsible to account. This is a regular pattern in Jamaica. Police officers are allowed to kill with impunity. Trials of officers are almost unheard of - convictions even rarer. The government must take urgent steps to make the police accountable to the citizens they serve," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International fully supports the efforts of the police and the government as they seek to reduce crime in Jamaica. However this cannot be achieved by a police force that enjoys immunity from the

law. Crime is not stopped by the authorities sanctioning law-breaking by the police through lack of effective action.

"There are some in Jamaican society who believe that extrajudicial executions are a necessary evil in fighting violent crime. But the reality is that police officers who break the law and commit violations of human rights are increasing the level of criminality and are not contributing to crime reduction. The police need public support in their fight against crime but the public will not trust a police force that unjustifiably kills their fellow citizens."

The Jamaican Constabulary Force continues to kill at an alarming rate. 133 people were killed by the police force in 2002.

"The police have a right and a duty to protect themselves and others when they or members of the public are under threat. However, many of the police killings bear the hall marks of extrajudicial executions. Yet no officers are ever convicted." said Amnesty International.

"The human rights of every police officer in Jamaica is under daily threat from rampant criminality. However, every officer of the Force is obliged to respect the human rights of the country's citizens, including those in conflict with the law. Any violation of the rights of Jamaican citizens must be punished, whether it is committed by a private citizen or by an officer of the law."

In recent weeks, the government of Jamaica appears to have taken decisive action against corruption in the Jamaican Constabulary Force. Amnesty International calls upon the government to take similar measures to hold police officers accountable for committing extrajudicial executions. To Amnesty International's knowledge, not one police officer has been convicted of an extrajudicial killing since 1999, despite over 600 killings at the hands of the police since that date, many in disputed circumstances.

## **Background**

Seven young men and boys, Reagon Beckford, aged 15, Lancebert Clark, 19, Christopher Grant, 17, Curtis Smith, 20, Andre Virgo, 20, Dane Reynaldo Whyte, 19, and Tamayo Wilson, 20 - now commonly known as the "Braeton Seven" were killed on 14 March 2001, just before dawn, by officers from the Crime Management Unit, a specialist unit within the Jamaica Constabulary Force.

In witness statements the police claimed to have come under fire from inside the house after identifying themselves and requesting those inside to surrender. Officers claimed that they subsequently returned the fire as police entered the house and shot at the "flashes" visible from the guns of those shooting. All seven young men were killed outright after receiving 46 gunshot wounds in total; of which 15 were to the head.

Local residents told a different story and gave testimonies detailing how the young men begged for mercy before being shot one at a time by law enforcement officers. Although investigations were conducted by the police and an independent civilian investigative unit, no one has been held accountable. A coroner's inquest later returned a 6-4 verdict that no-one should be held criminally responsible for the youths' deaths. Amnesty International believes the inquest proceedings were flawed in important respects.

In preparing its report Amnesty International sought the expertise of firearms technician Inspector Jon Vogel - a UK police officer- to assess the evidence relating to the gunshot wounds received by the Braeton Seven. Having examined the official autopsies of the seven and other documentary evidence, Inspector Vogel concluded that:

"It is inconceivable that Curtis Smith and Andre Virgo were shot in the manner described by the police. It would not be possible to achieve the pattern of gunshot wounds on each of the young men's heads

in the manner described by the police in their statements. I suspect that their heads were made temporarily immobile while the shots were fired at relatively close proximity."

Inspector Vogel's report also stated that, when firing shots at the muzzle flashes of guns in the dark, "it would not be possible to fire at individual threats" and the shots "could be expected to be inaccurate". Shots therefore appeared to be "deliberately aimed".

Jamaica currently suffers from an extremely high crime rate. In 2002, a reported 1045 people were the victim of murder, including 16 members of the police force. UN statistical sources indicate that it has one of the highest per capita murder rates in the world.

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