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Fiji: Justice must not be selective

As 15 soldiers convicted of mutiny were sentenced today, Amnesty International called on the Fijian authorities not to be selective in their administration of justice and the prosecution of coup-related crimes, and to investigate the torture and killings of mutineers by the military.

The ringleader of a mutiny in the Fijian army, Captain Shane Stevens, was sentenced to death commuted to life imprisonment by a court martial. Thirteen other defendants received prison terms ranging from 18 months to eight years. Twenty five more men are awaiting the trial in connection with the mutiny.

Amnesty International called on the authorities to investigate the torture by the military of suspected mutineers, four of whom died as a result of their beatings.

"The Fijian government must ensure that grave human rights violations are investigated and all suspected perpetrators brought to trial," Amnesty International said.

"Justice for those who lost their lives at the hand of mutineers must be matched by justice for those who were tortured and killed by the military," Amnesty International added. "Two years after the incident, the military appears to be effectively protecting suspects from being brought to justice for the extrajudicial execution and torture of prisoners."

A police investigation into the incident was stalled in 2001 by the military's failure to cooperate, and their prevention of police from interviewing and prosecuting suspects.

"All suspected perpetrators of human rights violations in the security forces must be brought to trial in accordance with international standards. These standards apply equally to those who participated in the mutiny and to those involving in suppressing it," Amnesty International said.

The organization also called on the authorities to build on the March 2002 removal of the death penalty from the criminal code with the repeal of the death penalty under military law.

Background

On 2 November 2000, six months after a violent coup, members of the army's elite Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit tried to stage a mutiny within the military headquarters at Queen Elizabeth Barracks in the capital, Suva. The uprising was aimed at replacing military commander Rear-Admiral Voreqe Bainimarama.

The mutiny, during which three soldiers died, was put down and many members of the elite unit were arrested. According to witnesses, prisoners were severely beaten by soldiers after arrest. Four of the prisoners died as a result of the beatings, and at least half a dozen others were treated in hospital for injuries sustained after their arrest. Family members, lawyers and non-governmental organizations were refused access to the prisoners for many weeks.

By May 2001, the Fiji police had gathered evidence to lay murder charges against soldiers suspected of beating prisoners to death; however, the military appear to have prevented the police from interviewing and prosecuting the suspects of these killings.

Public Document

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