

Dominican Republic: Efforts to end impunity must continue

While the number of unlawful killings by security forces remains worryingly high in the Dominican Republic, efforts to investigate them and bring those responsible to justice seem to be limited to a few high profile incidents, Amnesty International said today releasing its new report *Dominican Republic: Killings by Security Forces*.

In 1999 at least 200 people were killed by security forces, mainly by members of the National Police, and fatal shootings have continued throughout the first months of 2000. Although many of the killings are explained as the result of exchanges of gunfire with criminal suspects, this version of events is often disputed by eyewitness accounts or other evidence.

In June 2000, six Haitian citizens and one Dominican were killed by an army patrol after they had entered the Dominican Republic by truck. A commission of military officers was established to investigate the incident. However, Amnesty International urges that such investigations and any follow-up action be carried out under the jurisdiction of civilian, not military, justice.

"Recent trials have shown that efforts are being made to hold those responsible for human rights violations to account," Amnesty International acknowledged, pointing to the convictions earlier this month of security officials involved in the killing of journalist Orlando Martínez Howley in 1975 and of Father José Antonio Tineo in 1998.

"Cases such as these, that are now the exception, must become the rule," the organization said. "Each and every death at the hands of the security forces must be fully and impartially investigated, and those responsible for unlawful killings must be brought to justice."

Amnesty International is also urging the authorities in the Dominican Republic to review existing rules and regulations on the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials to ensure that they are in line with international standards; to take all steps required to guarantee compliance with them; and to develop a range of options for non-lethal use of force.

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