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Guyana: The murderers of Mohammed Shafeek must be brought to justice

Amnesty International today welcomed the unanimous verdict returned on 27 November 2001 by an inquest jury that the Guyana police should be held criminally responsible for the death of Mohammed Shafeek, a 47-year old fish-seller, in Brickdam police lock-up between 2 and 3 September 2000.

“This ruling, whilst welcome, is however but a first step in the quest for justice in this case. The authorities should ensure that the police officers involved are brought to justice,” the organization said.

The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) must now make a ruling as to whether criminal charges will follow.

Amnesty International is concerned about reports of police intimidation of witnesses. One witness alleged that he was subjected to a mock execution, after police pulled the trigger of an unloaded gun which was held against his head. He was arrested, beaten and held in incommunicado detention.

“To guarantee the integrity of the judicial process, the authorities must also ensure that all witnesses involved are protected from retaliation, and that any police officer found to be involved in intimidation is prosecuted,” the organization said.

Since the death of Shafeek, there have been several other suspicious deaths in custody. In May 2001, Anthony Brumesh died in Aurora police lock-up. Witnesses alleged that he was beaten and slammed against the wall by police officers.

Background

The killing of Mohammed Shafeek provoked a public outcry because of its brutality. Two policemen were alleged to have held him by his hands and feet, thrown him against a concrete wall. He was refused medical attention. An autopsy report revealed fractures to Shafeek’s skull, neck, spinal cord and wrists. Police initially refused to confirm Shafeek’s detention or death to his family for two days. Relatives were denied permission to observe his autopsy. At the time of his death, police issued a statement alleging that Shafeek had died on 2 September at 20:30 hours after being arrested for loitering under the influence of alcohol. Police subsequently claimed that Mohammed Shafeek was killed by Venezuelan sailors who had since left the country.

There have been many reports of torture, ill-treatment and incommunicado detention in Brickdam lock-up over several years. These reports also mirror more general patterns of excessive force, including extra-judicial executions and torture, used by law enforcement officials in Guyana.
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