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Guyana: a call for transparency in the Bourne case

The findings of the inquest into the death of Victor Bourne at the hands of security forces should be published in full, Amnesty International said today. On 14 April 2000, a four member jury returned the verdict that no one could be held criminally responsible for his death and that the officers involved had acted in self defence.

Victor Bourne was fatally shot by two members of the Quick Reaction Group* at his home in Rasville, Roxanne Burnham Gardens, Georgetown, on June 19 1998 (see Amnesty International's Annual Report for 1999).

The police's version of the shooting appears to be contradicted by eye-witness testimony. Whilst police reports allegedly indicated that he opened fire after being confronted by the police, witnesses stated that he was still in bed asleep when the police shot him and that the police then fabricated evidence to suggest that Bourne had shot at them.

Amnesty International believes that disclosing the findings of investigations into incidents of disputed police shootings is crucial to building confidence within the Guyanese public in law enforcement agencies and in their ability to act within a framework of law and accountability.

"Failure to properly inform the public may effectively guarantee a system of impunity in such cases," the organization said.

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed concern that the use of force by law enforcement officials in Guyana appears to be excessive in many cases. In March, the organization urged the government of Guyana to pay particular attention to the recommendations of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, which had just reviewed Guyana's delayed second periodic report on allegations of extra-judicial killings and excessive use of force by law enforcement officials.

"To prevent a system which fosters a climate of impunity, all incidents of excessive use of police force should be promptly and thoroughly investigated by an impartial body," Amnesty International said.

"In cases where human rights violations are found to have taken place, offenders should be prosecuted and effective remedies provided to victims," the organization added. "Policy and practice for law enforcement officials should conform to international human rights standards."

*QRG, commonly known as "black clothes", a special branch of the Guyana Defence Force
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