

Public Statement

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Trinidad and Tobago: Amnesty International calls for an independent investigation into the death of Anton Cooper

As many questions remain unanswered in the death of Anton Cooper, Amnesty International is calling today on the Trinidad and Tobago authorities to immediately open a thorough, independent and impartial investigation and to bring all those responsible for the death of Anton Cooper to justice.

The investigation must be carried out in accordance with international standards which state that relatives must be given access to autopsy proceedings -- including appointing an independent doctor to undertake or observe post mortem examinations -- and must be kept fully informed of the status of investigations.

Amnesty International is also calling for an urgent investigation into the activities of the prison guards who were on duty the night that Anton Cooper was allegedly beaten to death.

Reports indicate that Anton Cooper, 27, was found naked and dead in his cell at the Golden Grove Prison, Arouca Trinidad, on June 25, 2001, less than 24 hours after he arrived at the Remand Centre. Cooper had been in police custody for allegedly beating a cousin during an argument.

Several prisoners from the Remand Centre reported that they could hear sounds of beating and screams coming from Cooper's cell the night he died. He could be heard screaming in pain and calling for a doctor. One prisoner reported that the prison guards hit Cooper with batons, punched and kicked him in his cell. Sources also indicate that prison guards returned a second time and allegedly assaulted Cooper again, and then placed him in a new cell after making him have a cold shower.

Anton Cooper's family reports that after the autopsy when they saw his body it bore signs of lacerations to his head and under his eye and there were bruises to his face and body. The autopsy report indicated that he died as a result of "asphyxia associated with multiple blunt traumatic injuries". The Cooper family are requesting an independent investigation into how he died.

Amnesty International has repeatedly and publicly condemned the excessive use of force by prison authorities in Trinidad. The organization is concerned that prison authorities are using excessive force in contravention of international standards. Amnesty International urges the government of Trinidad to enforce international standards as they apply to the police and that all incidents of unlawful killings must be investigated and those responsible should be brought to justice.

Background

In September 2000, Pierre Sane, Secretary General of Amnesty International raised concerns regarding prison conditions and deaths in custody while visiting Trinidad. Sane, stated that prison conditions in Trinidad continue to violate United Nations standards for minimum treatment of prisoners as well as amounting to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

In the 2001 Annual Report Amnesty International named Trinidad and Tobago as one of several countries in the Caribbean which continues to report cases of torture and ill-treatment at the hands of security forces and prison guards. Commenting on the findings of the Annual Report General Secretary of the Prisons Officers Second Division Association, Michael Mollinueau stated that the conditions mentioned in the Amnesty report were "highly factual" and could not be contested.

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