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Jamaica: Investigate Killings in Tivoli Gardens

Reports of Unarmed Men Shot by Soldiers



Soldiers patrol a street in the Tivoli Gardens neighborhood of Kingston on May 27, 2010. © 2010 Reuters

(Washington, DC) - Jamaican authorities should conduct prompt, thorough, and impartial investigations into alleged extrajudicial killings by state security forces in the Tivoli Gardens section of Kingston, Human Rights Watch said today.

Human Rights Watch has received credible reports from local human rights advocates indicating that some of the more than 70 deaths in a joint police and military operation to arrest the alleged illegal drug trafficker Christopher "Dudus" Coke may have involved extrajudicial executions of civilians by members of the Jamaican security forces. In several instances, witnesses reported seeing soldiers shoot unarmed men at point-blank range.

"An independent and impartial investigation is critical to determine whether any of the killings were in fact the result of excessive force or outright executions," said José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director at Human Rights Watch.

The joint police and military operation on May 23, 2010, touched off three days of violence. The dead included three members of the security forces. Officials and media reports said that the security forces encountered an armed, organized opposition by Coke supporters. Tivoli Gardens has long been known as a stronghold for the Shower Posse gang, which Coke allegedly runs.

The United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials provides that law enforcement officials, in carrying out their duty, shall, as far as possible, apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force and firearms. Whenever the lawful use of force and firearms is unavoidable, law enforcement officials shall use restraint and act in proportion to the seriousness of the offense. The legitimate objective should be achieved with minimal damage and injury, and preservation of human life respected. The Basic Principles call for an effective reporting and review process, especially in cases of death and serious injury.

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