



# Caribbean Labour Solidarity

## Information Sheet

# Police Violence in Jamaica

## Tivoli Gardens Massacre

On 24 May 2010, Jamaican police and military initiated a joint operation in the West Kingston community of Tivoli Gardens, to arrest Christopher Coke, wanted in the USA for drug and arm-trafficking charges. During the first two days of the operation, at least 74 people, including a member of the Jamaica Defence Force, were killed and at least 54 people injured. More than 40 of those killed in Tivoli Gardens are alleged to have been the victims of extra-judicial executions by the security forces. Two people reportedly taken into custody remain unaccounted for and may have been victims of enforced disappearance.

Many firsthand accounts suggest that the killings were carried out by the Jamaican security forces long after the neighborhood was under their control. The operation was assisted by a surveillance plane from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which was flying above the neighbourhood and relaying information to the Jamaican authorities. Under the state of emergency (which was in force between 23 May and 22 July 2010 in selected parishes), more than 4,000 people, including several children, were detained without charge. The vast majority of those detained were released without charge.

In May this year Public Defender, Earl Witter, charged with investigating the deaths, stated that the security forces used "excessive or undue resort to lethal force during the operation". Witter also doubted that the weapons "discovered" by the security forces were actually from Tivoli.

Lloyd D'Aguilar of the Tivoli Committee, in a recent letter to the Gleaner wrote:

*A commission of enquiry even with "international" commissioners can do no better than the public defender IF there is no commitment in advance for the government to commit to referring the matter to the International Criminal Court.*

As a signatory to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (though not ratified) the government can under Article 12(3) of the ICC Statute invite the ICC to exercise jurisdiction over the matter. We believe that this is the ONLY way to ensure that any enquiry which uncovers evidence that those who had command responsibility for the massacre have a case to answer (as we believe they do) that there can indeed be a prosecution." This is the only way to satisfactorily resolve the issues of this, the worst massacre since 1865 Morant Bay massacre.

### **Conduct a public enquiry into the policy of police extrajudicial killings in Jamaica now!**

For many decades the Jamaican police force has been accused by citizens and human rights bodies, local and international, of carrying out summary executions of Jamaican citizens.

*Sign the petition by the Movement to end Jamaica police extrajudicial killings*

<http://www.change.org/en-GB/petitions/terrence-williams-conduct-a-public-enquiry-into-the-policy-of-police-extrajudicial-killings-in-jamaica-now>



*The number of fatal shootings by Jamaican police reached 13 in the first 13 days of January*

# Jamaica's state policy of police extrajudicial killings

**ON a per capita basis, and for decades, Jamaica has had one of the highest police killing rates in the world. Over that period prime ministers and ministers of national security have made statements supporting these killings thereby giving the stamp of approval of the state at the highest level. In other words, the explanations about rogue cops and untrained policemen are but scapegoats.**

In the sixties, prime minister Hugh Shearer exhorted the police to '*shoot first and ask questions later*'. In the seventies Michael Manley presided over the dreaded Suppression of Crimes Act, which gave the police unlimited powers to abuse civil liberties. Dudley Thompson, Manley's minister of national security at the time, casually stated that '*no angels*' died in the 1978 massacre of five men at Green Bay, an army firing range. In the eighties under Edward Seaga the killing rate soared to over 318 in one year. In the nineties prime minister PJ Patterson promised to buy hearses for the police so they could pick up the bodies of their victims. The worst record to date is that of Prime Minister Bruce Golding who presided over the 2010 police killing of 73 to 200 people in Tivoli Gardens.

## Origins

The origins of the policy? Well, the justification has always been that Jamaica also has one of the highest murder rates in the world and, with a dysfunctional justice system, the only way to get rid of these gunmen is to kill them. In 2013, for example, the police killed 258 people.

In the inner city communities, there have been numerous demonstrations against these type of police killings. International human rights organizations - Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, IACHR - have produced numerous reports condemning the government for doing nothing to stop the killings. There was even a time when the British government temporarily banned sales of weapons to the police for fear that they would be used to kill innocent citizens. Local human rights organizations - Jamaicans for Justice (JFJ) and the Independent Jamaica Council for Human Rights - have also been very vocal in condemning the practice.

After years of being in denial about the killings, government finally set up the Independent Commission of Investigations (INDECOM) in 2010 to investigate police killings. Supposedly with an independent investigative body - the police no

longer investigating themselves - rogue policemen would be brought before the courts and convicted for violating citizens' right to life. The result? Police killings have continued unabated, and have increased dramatically especially over the past three years. In its almost four years of existence, INDECOM has not been any more successful in breaking the decades-old drought of not a single policeman being convicted for any of these killings.

## Impasse

Hard policing is just another euphemism for saying that the police have no option but to kill in order to defeat the gunmen. And the police always maintain, no matter how obvious it is that they deliberately targeted and killed their victim - that it was a 'shootout.'

So, could this impasse ever be broken? Well, an opportunity may have presented itself with a front page Sunday Gleaner story where the writer says that two policemen, one of whom is retired, have admitted to him that these killings are often planned and directed by senior police officers.

## Enquiry

The Tivoli Committee which is pushing for the Tivoli massacre to be referred to the International Criminal Court for investigation and prosecution has publicly asked INDECOM to immediately convene a public enquiry into this policy of extrajudicial killings.

It is hoped that at such an enquiry, senior police officers, ministers of government, not excluding the prime minister, and whistleblowers within the force, would be called upon to tell what they know about the policy.



planned and directed by senior police officers.

For more details contact  
**Caribbean Labour Solidarity**  
at [info@cls-uk.org.uk](mailto:info@cls-uk.org.uk)

Invite a speaker to your trade union or community association

Regular updates on the website:

<http://www.cls-uk.org.uk>