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CCSJ MEDIA RELEASE

CCSJ CONDEMNS TORTURE OF A MINOR IN GUYANA

The Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ) unreservedly condemns the alleged acts of torture on a 14 year old boy by police at Guyana's Lenora Police Station while the boy was in police custody. Pope Benedict XVI has said that "the prohibition against torture cannot be contravened under any circumstance."

Solidarity is a key social justice principle. We are one human family and wherever injustice rears its ugly head, we must be prepared to stand in solidarity with the victim(s).

One of the key elements of a democracy is the protection of human rights. Guyana is a signatory of international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, and the UN Convention Against Torture. Torture is a moral issue; it is a violation of the God-given dignity of the human person.

Catholics believe that the moral test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable. CCSJ considers the alleged dousing of the 14 year old boy with alcohol and the setting of his genitals ablaze as abominable and reprehensible acts. These are in clear violation of the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, of the above international instruments and of the Guyana Police Force's own motto: *Service and Protection*.

CCSJ is deeply concerned about reports in Kaieteur News, one of Guyana's daily newspapers, that the minor's parents, Doodnauth Jaikarran and Shirley Thomas, alleged that police had them "going from one police station to the next without disclosing his (their child's) whereabouts."

What is just as disturbing are reports that, in violation of Article 141 of Guyana's Constitution, for 4 days the detained child was denied access to a legal advisor of his own choice, who, in this case, was an eminent Senior Counsel.

There is cause for concern when one reads the US Department of State's 2008 Human Rights Report on Guyana which states, inter alia, that "While the government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, there were problems in some areas. The most significant reported abuses included potentially unlawful killings by police, mistreatment of suspects and detainees by the security forces....Although the law provides criminal detainees prompt access to a lawyer of their choice and to family members, in practice these rights were not fully respected. Police routinely required permission from the senior investigating officer, who was seldom on the premises, before permitting counsel access to a client. There were reports that senior officers refused to grant prompt access to prisoners."

In light of the above report and because of the gravity of the crime committed, CCSJ fully endorses the demands made in the Oct 31 statement by 25 Guyanese lawyers, including Bernard

De Santos, Senior Counsel and former Attorney-General of Guyana. All right-thinking persons should rally around these demands:

“1. The immediate institution of criminal charges against those responsible for the torture of the minor at the Lenora Police Station between the 27th and 30th October 2009.

2. The establishment of an independent public Commission of Inquiry into the following:

(a) Operational and structural procedures of the Guyana Police Force which led to the torture of a minor while in police custody.

(b) Operation and structural procedures which permitted these events to proceed undetected and unsanctioned.

(c) Operational and structural procedures which facilitated an Attorney-at-law being denied access to his client.

3. The immediate suspension of the Officer in charge of the investigation and the officer in charge of the station at which the minor was tortured during the conduct of the investigation into the events.

4. The immediate provision of medical and psychological treatment to the victim of these horrific events.”

The issue of human rights is on the agenda for the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. If our leaders are really concerned to partner for “a more equitable and sustainable future”, this is an issue that must be addressed – within the context of Good Governance.

CCSJ urges everyone to pray earnestly that God’s Kingdom of justice, peace, love, truth and freedom will reign in our region and in the world.

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