

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/surinam-parliament-urged-to-reject-amnesty-04-04-2012,42248.html>

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Americas - Surinam

Impunity threat

## Amnesty insult to memory of dictatorship's victims, including five journalists

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Reporters Without Borders is deeply shocked to learn that the Surinamese parliament yesterday approved an amnesty law for crimes against humanity under the past military dictatorship.



**Dutch version**

Proposed by six members of the ruling coalition and passed by 28 votes to 12, the law amends a 1989 amnesty law – which applied only to the civil war period from 1987 to 1992 – and grants immunity from prosecution for all such crimes from the time of Col. Desi Bouterse's military coup on 25 February 1980.

The murders of [five journalists](#) in the Fort Zeelandia military barracks on 8 December 1982 would probably remain unpunished for ever.

"This bill is an insult to the memory of the victims who paid with their lives for their commitment to human rights and freedom of information in the face of a regime of terror," Reporters Without Borders said. "Daring to use 'reconciliation' and national 'stability' as arguments for imposing impunity is the height of cynicism.

"The amnesty comes at a time when the Fort Zeelandia murder trial that began in 2007 is drawing to a close and evidence is accumulating against the main suspect, Desi Bouterse, who returned to power through the polls in July 2010 and continues to be president. Bouterse must be held accountable before the courts, even if this must wait until the end of his current presidential term."

Suspected of "conspiracy," 15 opponents of Bouterse's military regime were arrested, tortured and executed in the Fort Zeelandia barracks on the night of 8 December 1982. They included five journalists: **Andre Kamperveen**, the owner and manager of *Radio ABC*, **Frank Wijngaarde**, a *Radio ABC* reporter, and three print media journalists, **Leslie Rahman**, **Bram Behr** and **Jozef Slagveer**.

After the massacre, soldiers torched the premises of *Radio ABC*, *Radio Radika* and the daily

newspaper *De Vrije Stem*. No media was allowed to operate during this period aside from the state radio *SRS* and the daily *De Ware Tijd*.

Bouterse has recognised his “political responsibility” for the massacre but insists he was not present when it took place. This defence has been challenged in the course of the trial that began before a military court in 2007. An army officer who participated in the coup, Ruben Rozendaal, has testified against President Bouterse, prompting Bouterse to call him “Judas.” The prosecutor is due to present his final arguments on 13 April and a verdict is expected in May.

“The traumas of the past are perpetuated by impunity, which by definition runs counter to the rule of law and the expression of fundamental human rights,” Reporters Without Borders added. “In this respect, the courage shown by civil society, judges and journalists in other South American countries – especial former [Operation Condor](#) countries – has set an invaluable example.”

*On the picture, from left to right, middle rank : Leslie Rahman, Frank Wijngaarde, Bram Behr, Jozef Slagveer and Andre Kamperveen.*

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