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Haiti: Killing of human rights activist and his wife must be thoroughly investigated

Amnesty International is dismayed by the news of the killing on 8 February of Daniel Dorsinvil, general coordinator of the Platform of Haitian Human Rights Organisations (Plate-forme des Organisations Haïtiennes de Droits Humains – POHDH) and his wife, Girdy Lareche.

The couple was killed by a gunman in the residential neighbourhood of Canapé Vert of the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince. According to Haitian human rights organisations, Daniel Dorsinvil was shot in the heart, while his wife was shot five times.

The circumstances and the motives of the killings are unclear. The Secretary of State for public security has stated that it could be the result of an armed robbery which occurred after the couple had left a bank. However, a police spokesman, interviewed by a Haitian radio station, did not indicate a motive for the killings.

Haitian human rights organisations fear that it could be an assassination, especially considering the manner in which the couple was killed and the senior position of the human rights activist within the organisation.

The President of the Republic and the Minister for Human Rights and the Fight against Extreme Poverty promptly condemned the killings. In particular the Minister for Human Rights announced that formal instructions had been passed to the authorities concerned to find the culprits and bring them to justice and promised that “this crime will not remain unpunished”.

“These statements are welcome. It is now crucial that they translate into thorough, effective, impartial and independent investigations without delays. The “human rights defender angle” should be fully taken into account; that is the possibility that the killings are a reprisal for the defender’s human rights work.” said Chiara Liguori, researcher on Haiti for Amnesty International.

“Too many crimes and human rights violations in Haiti go unpunished. This should not be yet another case. It is the safety and the work of human rights defenders in the whole country which is at stake”.

Amnesty International is concerned about the degraded environment in which human rights defenders are operating in Haiti.

Several human rights defenders have reported to be victims of threats and attacks in recent times. The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights issued precautionary measures in favour of human rights lawyers Mario Joseph and Patrick Florvilus respectively in October 2012 and November 2013 requesting the Haitian state to adopt any necessary measures to guarantee the life and personal integrity of the lawyers.

In accordance with the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, authorities in Haiti must fulfil their obligation to protect human rights defenders and to fully investigate attacks against them and bring those responsible to justice. They also have the duty to guarantee that human rights defenders can carry out their work without fear of reprisals.