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USA: Four prisoners to be killed on the eve of Human Rights Day as USA heads for 100th execution in 1999

Four prisoners are scheduled to be executed in the USA on Thursday, the eve of Human Rights Day, deepening the shadow over US claims to be a paragon of human rights virtue, Amnesty International said today.

“Fifty-one years after the international community said ‘no more’ to state killing and cruelty, the USA may yet execute its 100th prisoner in one year, something it has not done since 1951”, Amnesty International said.

While a majority of countries have abandoned judicial execution, the USA is only nine executions away from a total of 600 since it resumed judicial killing in 1977. Nearly 500 of these executions have been carried out in the 1990s. The USA has not executed four prisoners in one day in the modern era of the death penalty.

“Four executions a few hours before Human Rights Day would be a brutal reminder of where the USA stands on the fundamental right to life,” Amnesty International said. “These state killings continue to deepen, not demolish, a culture of violence.”

Ninety-one prisoners convicted of capital murder have been gassed, electrocuted or lethally injected in the USA so far this year. Ten more executions are scheduled for the 10-day period beginning on 8 December. The first execution -- that of David Long in Texas, scheduled for Wednesday evening, local time -- has been thrown into doubt after the prisoner apparently took a drug overdose on Tuesday night.

Amnesty International continues to call on the US authorities to stop these executions and take genuine steps towards abolishing the death penalty, in line with international standards.

Background Information

December 9 Executions:

- Indiana: DH Fleenor -- two priests have given recent affidavits that Fleenor is mentally ill and does not understand the reason for his punishment.
- Oklahoma: Bobby Lynn Ross -- his lawyers say that he has been brain damaged since birth, and has the intellectual functioning of an 8 to 13-year-old child.
- Texas: James Beathard -- His co-defendant has retracted testimony that played a major role in putting Beathard on death row, and says Beathard is innocent of murder.
- Virginia: Andre Graham -- scheduled to become the 14th inmate executed in Virginia in 1999, the most in any year since the state resumed executions in 1982.

Other scheduled executions:

- 8 December - David Long (Texas)
- 14 December - Robert Atworth (Texas), Jack Greene and Andrew Sasser (Arkansas)
- 15 December - Sammie Felder (Texas)
- 17 December - Wendell Flowers (North Carolina)

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>