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USA: Where is the compassion? New Amnesty International report on the case of Scott Panetti

Amnesty International members worldwide are seeking clemency for Scott Panetti, a mentally ill man facing execution in Texas on 5 February.

"His trial has been variously described as a circus, a farce, immoral and a mockery of justice by people who were there", Amnesty International said. "One word for his impending execution is 'indecent'."

Scott Panetti already had a long history of mental illness, including schizophrenia, when he shot his parents-in-law to death in 1992. There is evidence that he was psychotic at the time of the killings, and that he was incompetent to stand trial. Not only was he tried, however, he was allowed to act as his own lawyer, which he did dressed as a cowboy and presenting an often rambling and bizarre narrative in his defence. The jurors voted for death.

"Some of the jurors indicated that they voted for execution out of fear", Amnesty International said. "If their verdict is carried out, it would be one more shameful episode in the ugly history of state killing in the USA".

"The death penalty assumes absolute, 100 per cent culpability," Amnesty International said, noting that the victims' daughter has said that she and her parents tried to get the police to remove Scott Panetti's guns shortly before the crime. "The impending execution of this mentally ill man once again shows the arbitrariness and unfairness of capital justice in the USA."

Next month, the USA may see its 900th execution since resuming judicial killing in 1977. The total is currently 891.

For a full copy of Amnesty International latest report: "USA: 'Where is the compassion?' The imminent execution of Scott Panetti", see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR510112004>

"USA: A lethal ideology", please see: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR511492003>

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