

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AMR 16/04/91

UA 334/91

Death Penalty

Distr: UA/SC

10 October 1991

BELIZE

Dean Edwardo VASQUEZ

Dean Edwardo Vasquez, aged 26 years, was sentenced to death by hanging by the Supreme Court of Belize on 21 June 1991. He was found guilty of the murder of his common-law wife on 16 August 1990. He appealed against his conviction, but his appeal was dismissed and the sentence affirmed by the Belize Court of Appeal on 17 September 1991.

The death penalty is mandatory for murder in Belize. Dean Vasquez' appeal is the second appeal to be dismissed by the Appeals Court since the appeal of Kent Bowers was turned down in 1985. Kent Bowers was subsequently executed in June 1985, despite a petition for clemency reportedly signed by 2,500 people.

The first appeal to be dismissed by the Appeals Court was that of Catalino O'Neill, convicted on 14 March 1991. He is currently on death row awaiting the outcome of an appeal to the Advisory Council (see UA 222/91, AI Index: AMR 16/03/91 of 28 June 1991).

According to the Constitution of Belize, the Governor General has the prerogative of mercy in death penalty cases, acting under the advice of the Belize Advisory Council. The Advisory Council is made up of 12 members, all citizens of Belize, appointed by the Governor-General. One of its functions is to advise the Governor General on the exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy, through the Privy Council in the United Kingdom. Amnesty International is urging the Governor-General to grant the prerogative of mercy and to commute the death sentence imposed on Dean Vasquez.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The government of Belize informed the United Nations' Secretary-General for his 1985 report on capital punishment that between 1979 and 1985 28 death sentences were imposed, and one execution was carried out. Since 1985, Amnesty International has learned of at least 8 further death sentences imposed, but none were carried out. In December 1990, Amnesty International appealed on behalf of Luis Santos, sentenced to death in November 1990 (see Luis Santos - Death Penalty Case, AI Index: AMR 16/02/90). Amnesty International subsequently learned that his sentence, as well as that of two other death row prisoners, was overturned by the Appeals Court and a retrial ordered in all three cases. After pleading guilty to a lesser charge of manslaughter all three were sentenced to eight years' imprisonment. At the time of writing, Dean Vasquez and Catalino O'Neill (see above) are the only prisoners currently known to be on death row.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty unconditionally, believing it to be the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and a violation of the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. Amnesty International works for the abolition of the death penalty throughout the world and for clemency in all cases where executions are feared to be imminent, regardless of the nature of the crime for which a prisoner has been convicted.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- stating Amnesty International's unconditional opposition to the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (please mention this first);

- welcoming the reduction in the use of the death penalty in recent years in Belize;

- urging the Governor-General to grant clemency to Dean Vasquez and commute the death sentence passed on him.

APPEALS TO

H.E. Dr. Dame Minita E. Gordon
Governor-General
Office of the Governor-General
Belize House,
Belmopan, Belize

Your Excellency

Telegrams: Governor General, Belmopan, Belize
Telexes: 211 BH

Rt. Hon. George Price
Prime Minister, Minister of Defence,
Finance and Home Affairs
Office of the Prime Minister
East Bloc,
Belmopan, Belize

Dear Prime Minister

Telegrams: Prime Minister, Belmopan, Belize
Telexes: 138 B2
Faxes: + 501 8 22886 (attention Prime Minister)

Mr. Horace Young CBE QC SC
Chairman
Belize Advisory Council
28 Regent Street
Belize City, Belize

Dear Sir

Telegrams: Chairman, Belize Advisory Council, Belize City, Belize
Tel: + 501 2 77406 or 72408

Hon. Glenn Godfrey
Attorney General
Attorney General's Office
Belmopan, Belize

Dear Sir

Telegrams: Attorney General Godfrey, Belmopan Belize

COPIES TO:

Human Rights Commission of Belize
PO Box 617
Belize City, Belize

Mr. Simeon Sampson
85 Allenby Street
Belize City, Belize

(Dean Vasquez' lawyer)

The Belize Times
PO Box 506
Belize City, Belize

(weekly newspaper)

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat or your section office if sending appeals after 21 November 1991.