

EXTERNAL

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4 February 1998

Further information on UA 400/97 (AMR 51/79/97, 19 December 1997) - Death Penalty

USA (TEXAS) Karla Faye Tucker (f), white

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Amnesty International deeply regrets that Karla Faye Tucker was executed in Texas on 3 February 1998.

In her final statement Karla Tucker reportedly asked for forgiveness from the victims' families and said she hoped her death would bring them peace: *"I hope God will give you peace with this. I am going to go face-to-face with Jesus now. Thank all of you so much. I love all of you very much. I will see you all when you get there. I will wait for you"*. In a TV interview hours before her execution she is reported to have said: *"If I go home [heaven] February 3rd, don't take that as God not answering our prayers. If he brings me home February 3rd, it's because in his wisdom, and his sovereignty, he knew that through that something greater is going to be accomplished"*.

The Texas Board of Pardons and Parole turned down her appeal for clemency in a vote of 16-0 (there were 2 abstentions) on 2 February - clemency has not been granted to any prisoner, for humanitarian reasons, under sentence of death in Texas since the death penalty was reintroduced there in the mid-1970s. Governor Bush denied granting a 30-day reprieve minutes before her execution and is reported to have said: *"May God bless Karla Faye Tucker and may God bless her victims and their families."*

Karla Tucker was the first woman to be executed in Texas since 1863 and the second woman to be executed in the USA under current death penalty laws. In a state where executions have become a routine part of life, Karla Tucker's execution attracted unprecedented worldwide media interest and an appeal from Pope John Paul II. There was also support for her from unexpected quarters - a leading evangelist from the religious right reportedly said: *"This thing is vengeance, it makes no sense. This is not the same woman who committed those crimes"*. The sister of victim Jerry Lynn Dean and the brother of victim Deborah Thornton are also reported to have forgiven her and spoken out against her execution. However, the husband of Deborah Thornton is reported to have said: *"It's something we've been praying for, for many years. We have had to live with this monster in front of us all this time"*.

The execution sparked off a debate in the USA and internationally regarding the death penalty versus rehabilitation. While on death row Karla Tucker educated herself and became deeply religious. She never denied her involvement in the murders for which she was sentenced to death and spoke about her desire to help others learn from her experience.

Thank you to all those who sent appeals on Karla Tucker's behalf. Letters expressing regret at her execution may be sent to the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles and the state governor as indicated in the previous UA.