

PUBLIC

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Death penalty

25 January 2001

USA (Oklahoma)

Dorsie Leslie Jones, white, aged 61

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Dorsie Jones is scheduled to be executed in Oklahoma on 1 February 2001. He was sentenced to death in 1980 for the murder of Stanley Buck.

Dorsie Jones killed Stanley Buck and injured two others in a shooting in a bar in Lawton, Oklahoma, on 14 August 1979. At his trial, his defence was that he was unaware of his actions, due to the combined effects of alcohol and an anti-anxiety prescription drug he was taking at the time. The jury rejected his defence of temporary insanity and sentenced him to death. To this day, Dorsie Jones says that he does not remember anything about the shooting, and that he did not learn he was accused of murder until he woke up in jail the next morning and was taken for fingerprinting.

On 23 January 2001, the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board voted 3-2 not to recommend clemency. The Board has never returned a majority vote for clemency since executions resumed in Oklahoma in 1990, and the two votes for clemency were the highest number given to any prisoner by the current board members. The two who voted in favour of clemency were appointed to the Board by Oklahoma appeal courts. The three who voted against were appointed by the Governor. Under Oklahoma law, the Governor cannot grant clemency without a majority recommendation from the Board that he do so. Governor Keating is now limited to granting Jones a 30-day reprieve, and to asking the Board to reconsider its decision.

Dorsie Jones did not attend the clemency hearing in person. His attorney played a short videotape of Jones making a statement in which he repeated that he could not remember the events of 14 August 1979. He expressed his remorse and apologized to Stanley Buck's son, who was injured in the shooting: "Saying I'm sorry is the understatement of a lifetime".

At the clemency hearing, the Board members heard evidence that the prosecutor at Dorsie Jones' trial, Assistant District Attorney Robert Perrine, did not believe the case warranted the death penalty. He reportedly said that he only sought a death sentence after the Comanche County District Attorney told him to do so. According to another prosecutor who worked with him during the 1980s, Robert Perrine had intended to ask the Pardon and Parole Board to recommend clemency for Jones. However, 54-year-old Perrine died last year from a heart condition.

In his recorded statement, Dorsie Jones asked to be spared for the sake of his family. He suffers from heart disease and has been diagnosed with prostate cancer. Now 61 years old, has been on death row longer than any other Oklahoma inmate. He is said to be a model prisoner who has had two disciplinary write-ups in 20 years, one in 1980 and one in 1981. Neither involved violent incidents.

Members of Stanley Buck's family and an Assistant District Attorney urged the board not to block the execution. Referring to Jones's pastime of making wooden ship models, the Assistant District Attorney reportedly said: "Yes, he's a wonderful ship builder", but even if he made "a whole fleet of ships", it would still not erase his crime.

In arguing against a commutation of Jones' death sentence, the Assistant Attorney General also said to the Board that there was always the possibility that a prisoner serving life imprisonment without parole could escape.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Oklahoma has executed 35 people since 1990, five of these this year alone. With each execution it strays further from standards of justice and decency recognized in a majority of countries. More than 100 countries have abolished

the death penalty in law or practice, recognizing that its cruelty, its inescapable propensity for error and arbitrariness, and its failure to achieve any measurable societal benefit render it a punishment that belongs to centuries now past.

Earlier this month, Governor Keating reiterated his support for the death penalty: "Capital punishment is a statement of moral outrage and justice sought and received". "Maybe so", wrote one commentator in *Time* magazine after the execution of Wanda Jean Allen in Oklahoma State Penitentiary on 11 January, "but having executed a woman of marginal intelligence who had shamefully cut-rate trial representation, Bible-belt Oklahoma is no holier. It is no safer. It is no more civil."

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in every case, regardless of issues of culpability. Every death sentence is an affront to human dignity, every execution a symptom of a culture of violence rather than a solution to it.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language, IN YOUR OWN WORDS, opposing the execution of Dorsie Jones and urging the Governor to support a moratorium on executions in Oklahoma.**

**APPEALS TO:**

Governor Frank Keating  
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OK 73105, USA

**Fax:** + 1 405 521 3353  
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**Salutation:** Dear Governor

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of USA accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.**