

1 March 2001

AI Index AMR 51/031/2001 - News Service Nr. 38

## **USA: Flouting world trends, violating international standards - 700th execution imminent**

*The USA is about to carry out its 700th execution since resuming judicial killing in 1977, Amnesty International warned today, pointing out that more than 500 of them have occurred since 1993. Nine more prisoners are scheduled to be executed in the next nine days, including two this evening.*

*"The USA is engaged in a cruel, brutalizing, unreliable, unnecessary and hugely expensive activity for no measurable gain," Amnesty International said. "The fact that it is violating human rights standards in the process only adds to the deepening shadow being cast on its international reputation by its relentless resort to this outdated punishment."*

*As of this morning, there had been 697 executions in 31 US states since 1977. Between this evening and next Friday, nine more prisoners are scheduled to be put to death in seven states:*

*-- 1 March, Oklahoma: Robert Clayton - his IQ has been assessed at 68. An IQ of 70 or under indicates possible mental retardation.*

*International standards oppose use of the death penalty against such individuals.*

*-- 1 March, Virginia: Thomas Akers - he has borderline mental retardation and a long history of mental illness. He pleaded guilty to the crime, asked to be sentenced to death and has been allowed to drop his appeals.*

*-- 2 March, North Carolina: Ernest McCarver - his IQ has been measured at 67. He is facing execution despite the fact that the state legislature is about to consider proposals to outlaw the use of the death*

penalty against the mentally disabled. Thirteen of the 38 death penalty states have enacted such legislation.

-- 6 March, Georgia: Ronald Spivey, a 61-year-old is facing death in the electric chair after more than two decades on death row.

-- 7 March, Missouri: Antonio Richardson - International law prohibits the use of the death penalty against those who were under 18 at the time of the crime. Antonio Richardson was 16. This would be the USA's ninth execution of a juvenile offender since January 1998, out of a known world total of 12. Richardson's IQ has been assessed at 70.

-- 7 March, Texas: Dennis Dowthitt - he has been diagnosed with serious mental illness. His lawyers are fighting for a reprieve so that they can further investigate his long-held claims of innocence.

-- 8 March, Oklahoma: Phillip Smith - he has consistently maintained his innocence. He was convicted on circumstantial evidence. In 1999, the prosecution's key trial witness, who put Smith at the crime scene, recanted his testimony.

-- 9 March, North Carolina: Willie Fisher - he was defended by a lawyer whose severe depression and other health problems meant that did not adequately prepare for the trial. He was subsequently disbarred for failing to properly represent clients. International standards require that capital defendants be provided with adequate legal representation above and beyond the protection afforded in non-capital cases.

-- 9 March, Delaware: David Dawson - he has been incarcerated for 15 years. He has learned to read and write on death row. He is held in his cell 24 hours a day, except for 45 minutes of recreation, alone, followed by 15 minutes to shower three times a week.

Since 1977, there have been about half a million murders in the USA. The 700 men and women executed so far have been selected by a system riddled with arbitrariness, discrimination and error. It is a lethal lottery of which the USA should be ashamed, and which other countries should condemn.

*"The victims of violent crime and their families deserve respect, compassion and justice", Amnesty International said. "Killing a selection of prisoners offers none of these things. It is an illusory solution to a pressing social problem, and merely amounts to a failure of political vision."*

*Among the 700 were those who committed their crimes when they were still children, the mentally impaired, those denied adequate legal representation, foreign nationals denied their consular rights, and defendants whose guilt remained in doubt. Race continues to play a role in who gets a death sentence. In over 80 per cent of the 700 cases, the crimes involved white victims.*

*"There is no evidence that the US authorities have prevented a single crime with this policy," Amnesty International continued. "They have diverted countless millions of dollars away from more constructive efforts to fight crime. And the macabre absurdity is that it creates more victims – the family members of the condemned – often in the name of victims' rights."*

*"The death penalty is a symptom of a culture of violence, not a solution to it. The sooner US politicians begin to find the political courage to educate public opinion rather than hide behind it, the better".*

*Since the USA resumed executions in 1977, over 60 countries have abolished the death penalty. Currently, 108 countries, are abolitionist in law or practice.*

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