

URGENT ACTION

TENNESSEE GOVERNOR COMMUTES DEATH SENTENCE

On 14 July, the Governor of Tennessee commuted the death sentence of Gaile Owens to life imprisonment. She had been due to be executed on 28 September 2010. She was sentenced to death in 1986 for soliciting the murder of her husband.

Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen received a clemency petition from Gaile Owens on 31 July 2009. In a statement issued on 14 July 2010, Governor Bredesen said that “this appears to me an extraordinary death penalty case in which the defendant admitted her involvement in the murder of her husband and attempted to accept the district attorney’s conditional offer of life imprisonment... This case also raises unresolved allegations of domestic violence and emotional abuse”. He added that “this case therefore appears to me a proper one for the exercise of executive clemency.”

Governor Bredesen also granted Gaile Owens a credit for 1,000 days of her sentence and the right to earn additional sentence reductions.

Gaile Owens was tried jointly in early 1986 with Sidney Porterfield. The state’s case was that Gaile Owens had approached a number of men, offering them money to kill her husband, and that one of them, Sidney Porterfield, had carried out the killing. He was convicted of first-degree murder, and she of being an accessory to first-degree murder. Both were sentenced to death. Before the trial, the prosecutor had offered both defendants a life prison sentence in return for a guilty plea. Gaile Owens accepted the offer. However, Sidney Porterfield did not, and the prosecution withdrew the offer, having made it contingent upon its acceptance by both defendants. Since the trial, evidence has emerged of Gaile Owens’s abuse by her husband and of her abusive childhood.

The USA has carried out 1,219 executions since resuming judicial killing in 1977. Tennessee accounts for 6 of these executions. There have been 31 executions in the USA this year.

No further action by the UA Network is requested. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

This is the 1st update to UA 158/10. Index: AMR 51/062/2010 Issue Date: 12 July 2010 For more information see: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/062/2010/en

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