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**OPEN LETTER FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TO PRESIDENT CLINTON, FIRST LADY HILLARY CLINTON, VICE-PRESIDENT GORE AND MRS TIPPER GORE CONCERNING THE IMMINENT EXECUTION OF LARRY ROBISON IN TEXAS**

Dear Mr President, First Lady, Mr Vice President and Mrs Gore,

In recent months, you have been at the forefront of efforts to focus national attention on the challenges that mental illness presents to US society, and have launched a national campaign to eliminate the stigma attached to mental illness and encourage millions of US citizens with mental health needs to get help. With this in mind, Amnesty International wishes to bring to your attention the plight of a man whose mental illness is about to cost him his life.

Larry Keith Robison is scheduled to be put to death by lethal injection in Texas on 17 August 1999, 17 years after he killed five people in Fort Worth. He has always maintained that the appalling events of 10 August 1982 were the result of his chronic visual and auditory hallucinations brought about by his schizophrenia. Although he had been diagnosed as suffering from paranoid schizophrenia three years before the murders, the Texas mental health care services repeatedly said that they did not have the resources to treat him unless he turned violent. When he did turn violent, the state's response was to condemn him to death.

Mr President, you noted in your 5 June Radio Address to the Nation that "the hard truth is, in too many of our communities, and in too many of our hearts, mental illness is misunderstood and feared." How much greater was this ignorance and fear 17 years ago, when Larry Robison faced trial in a court in Texas? It seems that the jurors who sentenced Larry Robison to death did not believe that his crime could be attributed to mental illness. Whether this stemmed from their fear, misunderstanding, or the failure of the defence to present any of the three doctors who had diagnosed Larry as suffering from paranoid schizophrenia, remains unanswered. What is clear is that, in the absence of a judicial remedy, it will remain for Governor Bush and his appointees on the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles to decide Larry Robison's fate. Amnesty International urges that the White House does everything in its power and influence to persuade these decision-makers to grant Larry Robison clemency.

In your remarks at the first White House Conference on Mental Health on 7 June 1999, Mr President, you noted that "too many people with mental illness are not getting treatment because too many of our health plans and businesses do not provide equal coverage or parity for mental and physical illness, or because of the inadequacy of government." Mrs Gore, as the President's advisor on mental health policy, you noted in your own remarks to the Conference that "we want to encourage more Americans to get the help that they need, because when they get the help that they need, and it's the right help, they can lead productive lives in their communities, in our society."

Larry Robison was denied the “right” help when he and his family begged for it. After he was first diagnosed as suffering from paranoid schizophrenia at the age of 21, the necessary long-term treatment was not forthcoming, because he was not covered by medical insurance. His mother, Lois Robison, was repeatedly told that there were not enough resources to treat her son unless he turned violent. At one time, his family even left him in jail for six months because they considered that he would be safer there than on the streets.

Mr Vice President, you noted in your remarks to the Conference “that when mental illness strikes, it affects not only the person who is involved, but the entire family.” You also stated how “crucially important it is for families to be supportive and understanding”. The Robison family has been hugely affected by Larry Robison’s illness and his crime. His mother and her husband supported him before and after the shocking tragedy of 10 August 1982, and continue to campaign for his life and welfare to this day. His execution will make victims of them, as well as Larry’s own wife and teenage daughter.

Mr President, you pointed out to the Conference that “people with mental illnesses have always had to struggle to be treated fairly and to get the treatment they need -- and they still do.” However, you added an optimistic note when you said that “we have made a lot of progress by appealing to the better angels of our nature.” You also spoke about how you were continuing to ask yourself what more could be done “to deal with the unbelievable tragedies that were plainly avoidable...” Lois Robison believes that five people would be alive today and her son would not be now facing execution if her repeated pleas for help had been heeded.

Amnesty International respectfully appeals to you, Mr President, as well as the other members of the White House who spoke at the 7 June Conference - The First Lady, Vice-President Gore, and Mrs Gore - to do everything in your power and influence to prevent the final act of this tragedy from being carried out on 17 August.

Yours sincerely

Javier Zúñiga  
For the Secretary General

cc: Governor Bush, Austin Texas  
Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles