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# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 73/94

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**News Service 73/94**

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**USA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL APPEALS AGAINST PLANNED EXECUTION**

**John Wayne Gacy, scheduled to be executed in the US state of Illinois on 10 May 1994, should be granted clemency by the state Governor, Amnesty International said today. If the execution takes place, it will be the first in the state for over three years.**

**In a letter to the Governor of Illinois, James Edgar, Amnesty International expressed its concerns about the death penalty. The human rights organization is urging Governor Edgar to set an example to other US state governors by rejecting the death penalty as a punishment in Illinois. It urges Governor Edgar to commute Gacy's sentence of death and to commute the death sentences of any other prisoners which come before him in the future.**

**Amnesty International is aware of the very serious nature of the crimes for which John Gacy was convicted, and has deep sympathy for the victims of violent crime, their families and friends. But the human rights organization is unconditionally opposed to the death penalty and considers it to be inherently arbitrary and unfair, however heinous the crime for which it is provided and however scrupulous the procedures by which it is enforced.**

**"The risk of error is always present, yet the penalty is irrevocable," Amnesty International said.**

**Even one of the top judicial officials in the United States agrees with Amnesty International. Retiring Supreme Court Justice Harry A Blackmun recently concluded - in a dissenting opinion of a Texas death penalty case - that the death penalty in the USA, as it is currently administered is unconstitutional and "remains fraught with arbitrariness, discrimination, caprice and mistake." He further stated: "The problem is that the inevitability of factual, legal and moral error gives us a system that we know must wrongly kill some defendants."**

**Nor is there reliable evidence that the death penalty deters crimes more effectively than other punishments, Amnesty International said. A study conducted for the United Nations Committee on Crime Prevention and Control in 1988 concluded, after reviewing the research findings on the relation between the death penalty and homicide rates, that the evidence provided no positive support to the deterrent hypothesis.**

**"The use of the death penalty never serves any valid purpose, but instead serves only to brutalize the society which uses it, particularly the individuals involved in its process," Amnesty International said. "The overwhelming conclusion from studies on the issue is that there is no reliable evidence that the death penalty deters crimes more effectively than other punishments."**

**International human rights standards and treaties encourage governments to restrict the use of the death penalty, with a view to its ultimate abolition. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by the USA in June 1992, states that: "Every human being has the inherent right to life."**

**"There can be no more serious act of government than the deliberate killing of one of its own citizens", Amnesty International said. Killing John Wayne Gacy is counter to an international trend against such executions. More and more countries across the world have abolished the death penalty altogether. Recent abolitionist countries include Croatia, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary, Ireland,**

**Mozambique, Namibia, Romania, Angola, Switzerland, Gambia and Hong Kong. By June 1993, 52 countries worldwide had abolished the death penalty for all offenses, and 15 for all but exceptional crimes. A further 19 countries, while retaining the death penalty in law, have not carried out any executions for at least 10 years.**

**ENDS/**