

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## USA: Need for reflection on Human Rights Day

"With two executions scheduled to take place in the USA on 10 December, the 54th international Human Rights Day, US politicians should reflect on their country's selective approach to global standards of justice and decency," Amnesty International said today, noting that as many as five other men could also be put to death in the USA this week.

"More than half the countries of the world have turned their backs on judicial killing, recognizing its incompatibility with human dignity, its failure to have any special deterrent effect, and its capacity for fatal error", Amnesty International stressed.

"In contrast, the USA, which frequently claims to be the world's most progressive force for human rights, has put more than 600 men and women to death in the past decade, many in violation of specific international standards," the organization added, noting that earlier this year President Bush promised that "America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity" and Secretary of State Colin Powell asserted that "we will not relax our commitment to advancing the cause of human rights".

More than 60 people have been executed in the USA this year alone. They include a mentally ill man, several people whose legal representation was inadequate, prisoners whose guilt remained in doubt, a Mexican national denied his consular rights, and a Pakistan national abducted from Pakistan by US agents ignoring human rights safeguards.

The executions also include the only three child offenders (under 18 at the time of the crime) known to have been put to death anywhere in the world in 2002. Such executions, of which the USA is virtually the sole remaining perpetrator, violate international law and have been roundly condemned by the international community. In October, for example, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights noted that the prohibition is a non-derogable norm which "crosses political and ideological boundaries" and represents "prevailing standards of decency."

"When any state, let alone a country as powerful as the USA, insists on its right to adopt a selective approach to international standards, the integrity of those standards is eroded", Amnesty International continued. "Why should any other state not then claim for itself the prerogative to adhere to only those portions of international human rights law which suit its purposes?"

The USA's attitude to the system of international human rights protection has continued to cause concern throughout the past year on areas other than the death penalty:

During 2002, the US has approached governments requesting them to enter into agreements that they will not surrender US nationals accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes to the new International Criminal Court. In many cases, the US government threatened to withdraw

military assistance from countries that will not agree.

More than 600 detainees held in the US Naval Base in Guantanamo Bay remain in legal limbo, without access to the courts or lawyers. Some have been held for almost a year, with no prospect of release or trial. Others may face military commissions which would flout international standards for fair trial. Conditions of confinement, in small cells for up to 24 hours a day, with minimal opportunity for exercise, may amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and raise serious concern about the well-being of the detainees.

On 8 November, Amnesty International wrote to the US Government to express concern about the possible extrajudicial execution of six men in a car in Yemen, allegedly targeted by a CIA-controlled Predator drone aircraft.

This time last year, President George Bush proclaimed 10 December as Human Rights Day in the United States, stressing the importance of the promotion of human rights around the world and emphasising the USA's commitment to justice and human dignity.

"A year on, those words are ringing hollow with business as usual for US executioners, and with the USA's selective approach to international standards alive and well", Amnesty International said, adding that the USA should recognize the danger that such an approach poses to global human rights progress as well as the damage it inflicts on its own reputation abroad.

The two people who face execution on 10 December are Jerry McCracken in Oklahoma, and Desmond Carter in North Carolina. Linroy Bottoson could be executed in Florida today if a judge rules him mentally competent to be killed. James Collier and Jessie Williams are due to be put to death on 11 December in Texas and Mississippi respectively, and Anthony Johnson and Jay Neill are scheduled for lethal injection in Alabama and Oklahoma on Thursday.

See also USA: Human rights v Public relations, AMR 51/140/2002, 24 August 2002 at <http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/AMR511402002>

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