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USA: Amnesty International urges Tennessee not to become the 31st state of the execution union

Amnesty International has today written to Governor Don Sundquist of Tennessee, to urge him to stop the planned executions of Robert Coe and Philip Workman. The State of Tennessee has not carried out an execution for 40 years.

“We are asking Governor Sundquist to consider how history will judge such a retrograde step at a time when more than half of the world’s countries have turned their backs on the death penalty,” Amnesty International said today.

“Furthermore, the beginning of this new century has seen increasing numbers of people inside the United States beginning to question the ultimate punishment.”

Robert Coe was scheduled for execution on 23 March. Yesterday a District Court judge granted him a stay of execution. However, the state has appealed his ruling and is attempting to have the stay lifted by a higher court. Philip Workman remains scheduled for execution on 6 April.

“One has to look no further than the cases of Robert Coe and Philip Workman to see the injustice and fallibility that capital punishment inevitably carries in its wake,” Amnesty International says in its letter. The organization points out that Robert Coe is a man with a long history of mental illness and a childhood of appalling sexual and physical abuse, and that Philip Workman’s guilt in the crime for which he was sentenced to die has been called into serious doubt.

Amnesty International emphasizes in the letter that to oppose the death penalty -- as many leaders around the world now do -- is not equivalent to condoning violent crime or to belittling the suffering of the relatives of murder victims.

“Tennessee can still choose not to commit the final act of an outdated punishment,” the letter concludes, calling on Governor Sundquist to take this option, stop these executions and keep Tennessee free of state killings.

Background

Thirty US states have carried out executions since the USA resumed judicial killing in 1977.
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**For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London,
UK, on 44 171 413 5562.**