

EXTERNAL

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Further information on EXTRA 137/97 (AMR 51/61/97, 15 October 1997) - Death Penalty / Legal concern

USA (TEXAS) Kenneth Ransom

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Amnesty International very much regrets that Kenneth Ransom was executed, as scheduled, in Texas on 28 October 1997.

The execution went ahead despite a new statement from Ransom's co-defendant James Randle, stating that he was responsible for the stabbing deaths of three of the four victims; Richard Wilkerson, who was executed in Texas in 1993, admitted killing the fourth victim. Although only 16 years old at the time of the murders, Randle had an extensive history of violence. His psychiatric history indicates that he was an extremely volatile person who occasionally became violent without provocation. Randle corroborated Ransom's trial testimony that Ransom was unaware of the plan to rob the Malibu Grand Prix race track. Randle also admitted that when Ransom attempted to disengage himself from the crime, he attempted to stab Ransom, wounding Ransom's hand as he tried to defend himself.

Ransom's current defence attorneys argued in last-minute appeals that the new evidence from Randle made Ransom's death sentence disproportionate to his role in the crime. However, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals and the US Supreme Court denied the appeal.

In a last statement, Kenneth Ransom proclaimed his innocence, apologised for the pain suffered by the victim's families and spoke at length to his mother. He also stated: "I did not kill no one, but I feel like this is the Lord's will that will be done. I feel like I am an instrument in, hopefully, abolishing the death penalty forever."

Ransom's mother, Pearlie Ransom, screamed, collapsed and had to be assisted from the execution viewing chamber by prison officials immediately after the execution.

Amnesty International's Secretary General, Pierre Sané (who met Kenneth Ransom when he led an official AI delegation that visited Texas' death row on 9 October 1997) condemned the execution: "The state of Texas has let Kenneth Ransom down for his entire life. First the state failed to protect him from the abuse he suffered from his family. Then they subjected him to criminal justice proceedings while not providing him with adequate legal representation. The appeal process failed miserably to correct this situation, thereby allowing the state of Texas to commit the ultimate human rights violation on Mr Ransom - the death penalty. I condemn the madness of executions in Texas and pledge that Amnesty International will strengthen its fight against this pernicious evil. For me, Kenneth Ransom has become the human face of the many thousands of men and women facing execution in the USA and I mourn his death."

Kenneth Ransom became the 32nd prisoner to be executed in Texas this year bringing the total number of executions in the USA in 1997 to 61; 419 prisoners have been executed in the USA since 1977.

Thank you to all those who sent appeals on behalf of Kenneth Ransom. Letters regretting the execution may be sent to the authorities indicated in the original action.