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Jamaica: Visit by innocent man released from Florida's Death Row

At a time when Jamaica may soon resume hanging, former US death row inmate Delbert Lee Tibbs -- who spent more than two years on death row in Florida for a crime that he did not commit -- arrives in Jamaica tomorrow.

"I have faced the prospect of my life being taken by the state for a crime I did not commit. No society should risk putting their fellow citizens through such an awful ordeal," said Delbert Tibbs.

"No criminal justice system is immune from error. What happened to Delbert Tibbs is likely to be happening in Jamaica, where innocent people may have been sentenced to death as a result of unfair trials, poor legal representation and the acceptance of confessions extracted under duress," Amnesty International said.

Since 1973, over 100 other condemned prisoners have been released from US death rows after evidence of their wrongful convictions emerged. Evidence that the capital justice system is also characterized by racial discrimination and arbitrariness continues to mount.

"Judicial systems are run by human beings and human beings make mistakes. It is inevitable that innocent people will be hanged in the Caribbean if the death penalty is implemented," Delbert Tibbs added.

It is not known how many innocent people have been executed in the English-Speaking Caribbean region, but recent high-profile cases have seen a number of individuals acquitted in Jamaica on grounds of unsafe convictions.

"I know that the people of Jamaica face monstrous levels of violent crime," said Tibbs. "But killing people is not the answer."

Amnesty International is urging Jamaica and other Caribbean states to follow the courageous decision of Governor George Ryan of Illinois, USA to commute the death sentences of all 167 people on death row in the state.

***** Delbert Tibbs arrives in Jamaica on 3 February. For more information or to arrange an interview with him, please contact Amnesty International (Jamaica) on (876) 815 3648 or (44) 207 413 5764.**

Background

At the time of Tibbs' release in 1977, the original prosecutor declared that "the case had been tainted from the start and that the investigators knew it. If there is ever a retrial I would gladly appear as a witness." In 1976, the Florida Supreme Court overturned the conviction of Delbert Lee Tibbs on grounds of lack of evidence. He had been convicted two years earlier by an all-white jury of the murder of a 27 year old white man and the rape of his 16 year old female companion, and sentenced to death in Florida, USA, in 1974. His conviction rested solely on identification by the victim.

For more information about the use of the death penalty in the English-speaking Caribbean and the United States of America, see the following reports, all available at www.amnesty.org:

English speaking-Caribbean - Death Penalty: A legacy of Colonial Times, April 2002

<http://web.amnesty.org/802568F7005C4453/0/40DA062243F8727B80256B76004C6D70?Open>

USA - Arbitrary, discriminatory and cruel: *Aide-mémoire* to 25 years of Judicial Killing, 51.003.2002, January 2003

http://web.amnesty.org/802568F7005C4453/0/EA58F0BB8165716B80256B420040CD39?Open&Highlight=2,_g85km8p9ddm16qrr9e9ig_

USA - Fatal Flaws: Innocence and the Death Penalty, AMR 51/69/98, November 1998

<http://web.amnesty.org/802568F7005C4453/0/D68742CD70EE65678025690000692F0B?Open>

USA - Killing with Prejudice: Race and the Death Penalty in the USA, AMR 51/52/99, May 1999

<http://web.amnesty.org/802568F7005C4453/0/73ADE850D1562E3A8025690000693235?Open>

Public Document

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