

9 January 2001

AI Index AMR 51/005/2001 - News Service Nr.

USA:13 prisoners set to die in January, as the country prepares for new president

Eleven days before the United States inaugurates a new president, its executioners are preparing to kill the first of 13 prisoners set to die this month, Amnesty International warned today. Two men are scheduled to be executed in Texas and Oklahoma tonight.

"The USA must recognize the damage being done to its international reputation by its relentless and increasingly isolated use of this brutalizing punishment," Amnesty International said today.

The cases of the 13 illustrate how the USA is prepared to violate international standards in order to kill a small percentage of those it convicts of murder. For example:

Wanda Jean Allen's jury were left unaware of her substantial mental impairments due to her lawyer's inexperience and inadequate resources. On Thursday night in Oklahoma, she is set to become the first African American woman to be put to death in the USA since 1954.

Dion Smallwood, suffering from serious untreated mental illness at the time of his crime, is due to be executed in Oklahoma on 18 January,

Bobby Harris is due to be executed in North Carolina on 19 January. His lawyer was so ill with cancer that he failed to prepare adequately for the trial, and the jury never heard important mitigating evidence.

Philip Workman is due to be put to death in Tennessee on 31 January for killing a police officer during a robbery. There is strong evidence that he did not fire the fatal bullet.

"Outgoing President Bill Clinton utterly failed to take any meaningful stand against violations of US obligations relating to the death penalty occurring at state level," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International will be calling on President-elect George W. Bush, whose disturbing record on capital punishment is well-known, to broaden his view of justice and to take into account international standards of human rights and decency.

During George W. Bush's five-year governorship, 152 men and women were put to death in Texas, almost twice the amount killed in any other state in over two decades. In many cases, Texas violated international human rights safeguards in its pursuit of judicial killing.

"The USA is fast approaching its 700th execution since resuming executions in 1977, more than half of which have occurred in the past five years alone, Amnesty International said.

A majority of countries have turned their backs on the death penalty and found alternative ways to confront violent crime. They must redouble their efforts to persuade the USA to join them.

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