

**PUBLIC**

**AI Index: AMR 51/005/2005**

**7 January 2005**

**Further information on UA 330/04 (AMR 51/178/2004, 6 December 2004) and follow-up (AMR 51/179/2004, 7 December 2004) - Death penalty**

**USA (Connecticut)**

**Michael Bruce Ross (m), white, aged 45**

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It is anticipated that a bill to abolish the death penalty will be introduced into the Connecticut legislature in the coming days. Governor Rell, in her announcement that she would not issue a reprieve to stop the execution of Michael Ross, has said that she will veto any such legislation that is passed by the legislature (see previous update). A two-thirds majority in each chamber of the General Assembly (Senate and House of Representatives) is needed to be able to override a gubernatorial veto.

Michael Ross is scheduled to be executed by lethal injection in the early hours of 26 January. He has dropped his appeals against his death sentence. The State of Connecticut has not carried out an execution since 17 May 1960.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, regardless of the gravity of the crime, the guilt or innocence of the condemned, or the method used to kill the prisoner. The death penalty has not been shown to have a special deterrent effect, it denies the possibility of remorse, rehabilitation or reconciliation, and it consumes resources that could otherwise be used towards constructive strategies to combat violent crime and to offer assistance to those affected by it. Executions cannot guarantee emotional peace for the relatives of murder victims, risk brutalizing society, and undermine respect for fundamental human rights.

History shows that countries have not waited for public opinion to turn against the death penalty before abolishing it. Principled human rights leadership is required for such a step. The USA is still waiting for such leadership at the federal level and in the 38 US states which retain the death penalty.

Today, 118 countries are abolitionist in law or practice, and progress continues towards global abolition. Most recently, on 10 December 2004, the Senegalese Parliament adopted a bill abolishing the death penalty. Under the lead of President Abdoulaye Wade, the bill had been adopted unanimously by the government three months earlier. In October 2004, the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) published its report. It recommended abolition of the death penalty as "imperative". In Nigeria in October 2004, the National Study Group on the Death Penalty called on the Federal Government to impose a moratorium on executions. President Olusegun Obasanjo, who is personally opposed to the death penalty, had launched a national debate on the issue in November 2003.

At least 111 of the 945 people executed in the USA since 1977, including 10 of the 59 put to death in 2004 and the first person put to death this year, were so-called "volunteers", prisoners who had dropped their appeals and "consented" to execution. Such executions could perhaps be characterized as "prisoner-assisted homicide" rather than "state-assisted suicide". Any number of factors may lead a prisoner not to pursue appeals against a death sentence, including mental disorder, physical illness, remorse, bravado, religious belief, the severity of conditions of confinement, including prolonged isolation, lack of group activities, and of physical contact visits (as is the case in Connecticut), the bleak alternative of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, pessimism about appeal prospects, a quest for notoriety, or simply a desire to gain a semblance of control over a situation in which the prisoner is otherwise powerless. Rational or irrational, a decision taken by someone who is under threat of death at the hands of others cannot be consensual. What is more, it cannot disguise the fact that the state is involved in a premeditated killing, a policy that is a symptom of a culture of violence rather than a solution to it. Whether or not a prisoner who "asks" to be executed is deluding himself or herself about the level of control they have gained over their fate B after all, they are merely assisting their government in what it has set out to do anyway B the

state is guilty of a far greater deception. It is peddling its own illusion of control: that, by killing a selection of those it convicts of murder, it can offer a constructive contribution to efforts to defeat violent crime. In reality, the state is taking to refined, calculated heights what it seeks to condemn B the deliberate taking of human life.

**FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals, to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language, in your own words:**

- welcoming the fact that the State of Connecticut has not carried out an execution for nearly 45 years, and expressing deep concern that this situation is currently due to end on 26 January 2005;
- acknowledging the seriousness of the crimes for which Michael Ross was sentenced to death, and explaining that you are not seeking to excuse those crimes or to minimize the suffering caused;
- explaining why you think that the death penalty is bad government policy, and that to resume executions could only damage Connecticut's international image in an increasingly abolitionist world;
- welcoming indications that an abolitionist bill will be introduced into the General Assembly;
- asking the addressees to make your concern known to the General Assembly, and to do all in their power to support such legislation and to prevent the State of Connecticut from taking the backward step of resuming executions.

Senate

Senator Donald Williams, President Pro Tempore  
Legislative Office Building, Room 3300, Hartford, CT 06106-1591, USA

**Email:** Williams@senatedems.state.ct.us

**Fax:** +1 860 240 0208

**Salutation:** Dear Senator Williams

House of Representatives

Representative James Amann, Speaker of the House  
Legislative Office Building, Room 4106, Hartford, CT 06106-1591, USA

**Email:** Jim.Amann@cga.ct.gov

**Fax:** +1 860 240 0206

**Salutation:** Dear Representative Amann

**Please also continue to send appeals to Governor Rell as recommended previously:**

- expressing sympathy for the families of the murder victims in this case, and explaining that you are not seeking in any way to excuse the manner of their deaths or to minimize the suffering caused;
- welcoming the fact that the State of Connecticut has not carried out an execution since 1960, during which time more than a hundred countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice;
- regretting the Governor's announcement that she will not issue a reprieve in the case of Michael Ross;
- urging her to reconsider her decision, not out of sympathy for Michael Ross, or out of a lack of empathy for the murder victims and their families, but in order to reject her own and her state's involvement in the killing of a human being, however terrible the crimes of which he was convicted;
- urging her to do all in her power to prevent the State of Connecticut from taking this backward step, and not to veto any abolitionist bill that is passed by the legislature.

Governor M. Jodi Rell, Executive Office of the Governor  
State Capitol, 210 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106, USA

**Email:** Governor.Rell@po.state.ct.us

**Fax:** +1 860 524 7396

**Salutation:** Dear Governor

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of the USA accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. All appeals must arrive by 26 January 2005**