

14 January 1999

Further information on UA 305/98 (AMR 51/101/98, 3 December 1998) - Death Penalty / Legal Concern**USA (Oklahoma) Sean SELLERS, aged 29**

Sean Sellers remains scheduled for execution on 4 February 1999 in Oklahoma for crimes committed when he was 16. International law forbids the death penalty for crimes committed by people under 18.

Sean Sellers was moved to solitary confinement in a maximum security punishment cell on 9 December (see original UA). His transfer was a few days late because all three punishment cells were already occupied by men awaiting execution. Tuan Nguyen, John Duvall and John Castro have since been put to death (see UA 292/98, AMR 51/93/98, 10 November and updates). Sean Sellers has been writing a daily journal. Here are some extracts:

3 December: Later I was called out and taken to the Unit Manager's Office... [he said]: "I'll have a cell cleared at 6am Wednesday morning, Sean." Sounds so innocent and pristine, doesn't it? Sort of like those great military terms "Surgical strike", "Removal of prime target". Not once did he say, "We gotta kill someone to make room for you Sean".

8 December: Somewhere in the day a State psychologist came to my door with a clipboard... He said he was here to help me make this transition. THAT set me off. I said "How are you going to do that? What the hell do YOU know about being executed? I've been here for 12 years. I've seen all the executions Oklahoma has done, and I've seen my best friends die here, so what do you know about it?" The thing is, he seems like a nice guy, and I felt guilty for snapping at him.

9 December: Well it's real now! Here I am in the solitary cell... This cell feels very, very lonely. It's going to be hard to live in here. I can't tell whether it's day or night from in here. And time moves more slowly. It's only 4.30pm but it feels like night time. Like I've already been here for 10 hours, rather than three.

14 December: All prisons have those nights when hell seems to seep up through the floor and surround you. For some reason, some vigilant guard counted me every half hour last night. Every half hour, from 10pm to 6am, that outer door racked open, ZZZZ-CRACK! A light shined on my face, and the door was slammed shut. BLAM! All night long...

18 December: Later I hollered up to John Castro. The ventilation ducts in these cells are connected... We talked about our art, and having to give up our paints and brushes [Sean Sellers has become an accomplished artist in prison - he was not allowed to bring his artist's materials to solitary confinement]... Then John told me something that flabbergasted me. John's been here for 14 years. His 2-year-old son grew up while he was here, and they're close! They call, write, and visit. At his 30-day review the Warden told John he can't put his 16 year old son on the witness list to be present during his execution. The Warden said 16 was too young to watch something like that. Apparently in Oklahoma you can be sentenced to death at 16, but you can't watch that sentence carried out...

21 December: I just heard on the radio that John was denied 4 to 0 at his clemency hearing... Now he returns to his cell and prepares himself to die. The world has given him its final word; it has rejected him body and soul, breath and life. It has said, "You are not fit to live". And again I turn inward and ask, can a man make up for his crimes? Is there nothing he can ever do? For John Castro the world has answered. It has said NO.

28 December: [Sean has learned of public support for his execution] Is there NO room in the world for a man to do some good with his life? Would you stomp his hands at every feeble grasp to straighten a bruised flower, to bandage a wound, to reflect a light upon a darkened soul? If he dares to reach out of his cage to give a cup of his water to someone in thirst, would you cut his hand off? I just do not understand... Maybe it is a mistake for me to want to live, to try to make up for my crimes...

31 December: [Under prison policy, he has been strip-searched and X-rayed after meeting with his lawyer] Coming out of the Infirmary I looked at the sky, it made me catch my breath. Driving back I had a perfect view of the first sunset I have seen in 13 years. The baby blue sky blended into pink and purple toward the horizon, and the only clouds were a patched striation over the sinking sun. The walls and the towers crossed in front of it as we drove and became dark silhouettes. It made even the prison look beautiful. I thought I was going to die without ever seeing another sunset.

Sean Sellers's clemency hearing with the Pardon and Parole Board will take place on 27 January. Three of the Board members have just been replaced by new appointees. Please send as many appeals as possible to the Board as possible, particularly to the three new members (first three listed below). For more on Sean Sellers, see *Killing Hope: The Imminent Execution of Sean Sellers*, AMR 51/108/98, December 1998.

Please send faxes/express/airmail letters in your own words (please avoid mentioning AI or general anti-death penalty statements):

- expressing deep concern that Sean Sellers is to be executed for crimes committed when he was 16, and despite strong evidence that he suffers from a serious mental disorder only diagnosed after his trial and therefore not examined in state court, and despite his personal development in prison;
- expressing sympathy for the victims of violent crime and their families;
- urging that the Pardon and Parole Board recommend to the Governor to grant clemency.

APPEALS TO:

Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board, 4040 N. Lincoln Street, Suite 219, Oklahoma City, OK 73105-5221, USA

Tel: +1 405 427 8601

Fax: +1 405 427 6648

Salutation: Dear Board Members

If you are able to, please write to individual board members:

Mr Ronald E. Worthen, PO Box 1991, Ardmore, OK 73402, USA

Mr Flint Breckenridge, 2411 East 25th, Tulsa, OK 74114, USA

Mr Currie Ballard, Langston University, Highway 33, PO Box 787, OK 73050

Ms Susan Bussey, PO Box 636, Norman, OK 73070, USA

Ms Ruby Smith, PO Box 18831, Oklahoma City, OK 73154-0831, USA

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

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.