

PUBLIC

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Further information on UA 60/98 (AMR 51/13/98, 26 February 1998) - Death Penalty / Legal concern

USA (TEXAS) Joseph John CANNON

Amnesty International very much regrets that Joseph John Cannon was executed by lethal injection in Texas as scheduled on 22 April 1998.

According to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice the execution apparently failed on the first attempt when the needle "blew out of his arm" as the lethal solution began to flow into his body.

As a result, a weeping Cannon made two final statements. In both he apologized for killing Anne Walsh. "I am really sorry. I love you all. I love you, God," he said before the needle jerked free. Witnesses, who included Walsh's five sons, were quickly ushered out while the needle was reinserted. When they returned, Cannon was more composed. He smiled and told the witnesses, "I kind of lost my cool a while ago. I am sorry for what I did to your mom. It isn't because I'm going to die. All my life I have been locked up. I could never forget what I'd done. I am sorry for all of you. I love you all. Thank for you supporting me, thank you for being kind to me when I was small."

Cannon's mother, who wept and prayed while watching the execution, fainted afterwards when speaking to reporters outside the prison and had to be taken by ambulance to a Huntsville hospital.

One of Walsh's sons told reporters after the execution: "Job well done, end of story".

The execution took place despite an international outcry against it being used in a case involving a juvenile offender -- Cannon was 17 years old at the time of the crime, and had a highly disturbed background. Pope John Paul sent a letter to Texas Governor George W. Bush urging that the execution be halted. Likewise, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu called on the governor to spare his life, as did members of the parliament in Italy.

In recent weeks, Cannon acknowledged his guilt in many interviews and talked also of how he had changed during his long stay in prison. "I want people to know I have repented for what I have done, and if I could do something, anything, to change what has been, I would". Cannon said in an interview on Italian television. "I am very ashamed that I have to die in this way. ... This is not the way I want to leave this planet".

Cannon's attorneys argued that the execution should not take place on the grounds that the United States had failed to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), forbidding capital punishment for those who commit crimes before the age of 18. Although it has signed the UNCRC, the USA is one of only two countries worldwide which have failed to ratify the treaty. The other is Somalia.

Cannon spent his last day talking with lawyers and family members.

Cannon was the fourth person to be executed in Texas in 1998 and the 148th in the state since capital punishment was resumed in 1982. Four hundred and fifty-five prisoners have been put to death in the USA since 1977.

Texas has scheduled the execution of another juvenile offender, Robert Carter, for 18 May 1998.

Thank you to all those who sent appeals on behalf of Joseph John Cannon. Letters expressing regret for the execution may be sent to the authorities indicated in the original action.