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Fatal Attraction -- Texas Leads US Executions, Florida Follows

With three executions in Texas and Florida in the past 24 hours, and a fourth scheduled this evening in Texas, the brothers Bush -- Governors of the two states -- are allowing the USA to stray further from international standards, and deepening the damage to US claims to be a progressive force for human rights, Amnesty International said today.

“As the world increasingly turns its back on the death penalty, as illustrated by Tuesday’s overwhelming vote for abolition in the Ukrainian parliament, Texas continues to lead the USA’s resort to judicial killing, with Florida apparently desperate to imitate it,” the organization said.

Texas accounts for eight of the 17 US executions so far in the new century, and 207 of the 615 since 1977.

Yesterday morning, Florida executed its first prisoner by lethal injection under a bill signed into law in January by Governor Jeb Bush. A second man was put to death this morning.

The State of Florida leads the country in the number of wrongfully convicted death row prisoners released since 1973, yet Governor Jeb Bush enacted measures in January to speed up executions there. On 31 January, in contrast, the pro-death penalty Republican Governor of Illinois imposed a moratorium on executions in his state because of its “shameful” record of sentencing the innocent to death. Illinois has released 13 former death row inmates, Florida 18.

At the time of the Florida legislature’s vote to expedite executions and introduce lethal injection, Governor Jeb Bush’s policy advisor expressed the hope that Florida would become more like Texas, adding “*bring in the witnesses, put them [the inmates] on a gurney, and let’s rock and roll.*”

“A desire to imitate the Texan approach to the death penalty displays either ignorance or contempt for global norms of justice,” Amnesty International continued, pointing out that Texas maintains appallingly low standards of legal representation for capital defendants and has carried out three of the world’s eight executions of child offenders in the past 30 months -- a blatant violation of international law.

Last night, Texas executed Cornelius Goss, who became the 120th prisoner put to death under the five-year governorship of George W. Bush, campaigning for US President under a banner of “compassionate conservative” and “reformer with results”.

“Such campaign slogans have been emptied of meaning in the face of an execution rate that exceeds most countries,” Amnesty International said. “With pretensions to be a leader on the world stage, Governor George W Bush may wish to consider what his record on the death penalty is doing to his reputation internationally.”

Tonight Texas is set to execute mentally impaired great-grandmother Betty Lou Beets. Betty Beets -- who is two weeks away from her 63rd birthday -- was denied clemency on Tuesday evening by the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles. The jury that sentenced her to death never heard about her history of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, including at the hands of several husbands. She was convicted of killing her fifth husband.

Amnesty International activists around the world have been appealing to the two Governors to stop the executions and move away from a punishment which is a symptom of, not a solution to, the culture of violence.

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