

**EXTERNAL (for general distribution)**

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**Death Penalty**

**20 May 1994**

**USA (Texas)**

**Willie WILLIAMS  
Robert WEST**

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Willie Williams is scheduled to be executed in Texas on 24 May 1994, and Robert West on 7 June.

According to information received by Amnesty International, Willie Williams, black, was sentenced to death for the murder of a white male. He was convicted and sentenced to death by a jury from Harris County, Texas, which is well known for its disparate treatment of African Americans in the criminal justice system.

According to figures dated from April 1993, 56% of those on death row from Harris County were African-American, and 35% white. At least 30 of the 76 prisoners executed in Texas under its present death penalty laws were tried and sentenced in Harris County.

Robert West, who is half-white and half-Native American, was sentenced to death in February 1983 for the murder of a white female in August 1982. He was also sentenced to death by a Harris County jury.

A major study on racial discrimination conducted in the 1970s found that, in Texas, offenders who killed white victims were several times more likely to be sentenced to death than white offenders who killed black victims.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Amnesty International has mounting concerns regarding the death penalty in Texas, which leads the nation in carrying out executions (Texas has executed 76 of the 239 prisoners executed in the USA since states resumed executions in 1977). Many prisoners do not have legal representation to present their appeals and the state continues to execute juvenile offenders, flouting international standards.

Under Texas clemency rules, the governor may commute a sentence of death only if she receives a favourable recommendation from a majority of the 18-member Board of Pardons and Paroles. Amnesty International remains concerned about the reluctance of the Board to hold full clemency hearings in death penalty cases. Apart from a number of commutations granted in the 1980s as the result of two key court rulings, the Board has never recommended clemency in any death penalty case in recent years.

Racial disparities in death sentencing in the USA as a whole are borne out by the findings of many research studies, and confirmed by the findings of the General Accounting Office (GAO), an independent agency of the federal government, in February 1990. The GAO review found that persons convicted of the murder of white victims are far more likely to be sentenced to death than those convicted of black-victim homicides. These racial disparities remained after all other legally relevant factors had been taken into account.

The study also found African-Americans who kill whites are sentenced to death

at nearly 22 times the rate of those who kill other blacks and more than seven times the rate of whites who kill African-Americans.

As of 20 April 1994 there were 386 prisoners under sentence of death in Texas; the largest death row population in the USA. The most recent person to be executed in Texas was Paul Rougeau on 3 May 1994. The method of execution is lethal injection.

Appeals to the Board of Pardons and Paroles:

- urging the Board to recommend that Governor Richards grant clemency to Willie Williams and Robert West;

Appeals to Governor Richards:

- urging Governor Richards to grant clemency to Willie Williams and Robert West;

Appeals to both:

- acknowledging the seriousness of the crime for which Willie Williams and Robert West were sentenced to death;  
 - expressing sympathy for the victims of violent crime, and their friends and families;  
 - citing arguments against the death penalty, for example, that detailed research in the USA and other countries has provided no evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishments; and that in the USA it is imposed disproportionately on people from poor backgrounds and black and other ethnic minority groups.

**APPEALS TO**

Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles  
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**Salutation: Dear Board Members**

The Honorable Ann Richards  
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**Salutation: Dear Governor**

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