

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AMR 51/90/93

Distr: UA/SC

EXTRA 86/93      Death Penalty

8 October 1993

USA (Maryland)      John Frederick THANOS

---

John Frederick Thanos is scheduled to be executed in Maryland, USA, during the week beginning 1 November 1993. If it is carried out, this will be the first execution in the state for 32 years.

John Thanos, white, was first sentenced to death in March 1992 for the murder of Gregory Taylor in August 1990; he received two more death sentences in June 1992 for the murders of Billy Winebrenner and Melody Pistorio in September 1990. Thanos has chosen to abandon his legal appeals and has consented to the state carrying out his execution. A hearing to decide whether Thanos is competent to waive his appeals will take place on 27 October in Maryland.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life, and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

The organization is particularly concerned at the move to resume executions in Maryland, which is contrary to international treaties and standards on the death penalty which encourage states towards the abolition of this punishment.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

There have been no executions in Maryland since 1961. In Maryland, the Governor has sole power to commute death sentences. The method of execution is the gas chamber. As of 30 July 1993 there were 14 people under sentence of death in the state.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned at the accelerating rate of executions in the USA which stands alone among Western industrialized countries in its continued use of the death penalty. Thirty-three prisoners have been executed nationwide so far in 1993; more than in any other year since executions resumed in the 1970s. Nearly half the countries of the world have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice, a trend which is particularly marked in both Western and Eastern Europe. Countries which have abolished the death penalty for all offences since 1989 include the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, Romania, Cambodia, Angola, Slovenia, Mozambique and Namibia. South Africa has suspended all executions since February 1990. In 1992 Paraguay abolished the death penalty for ordinary crimes.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express and airmail letters in English or in your own language, or call by telephone:**

- acknowledging the seriousness of the crimes for which John Thanos was sentenced to death and expressing sympathy for the families of the victims of violent crime;
- urging Governor Schaefer to grant clemency by commuting John Thanos' death

sentences;

- urging Governor Schaefer not to take the retrograde step of resuming executions in Maryland after 32 years without any;
- citing other arguments against the death penalty such as its lack of any proven deterrent effect against violent crime, and the arbitrariness of its use in practice;
- refer to the findings of the opinion poll conducted in March 1993;
- If your country has abolished the death penalty you can cite any useful national experience (eg no effect on homicide rate). It is especially important to mention any national experience demonstrating that the death penalty has no special deterrent effect against violent crime.

#### **APPEALS TO**

The Honorable William Donald Schaefer  
Governor of Maryland  
State House  
Annapolis, MD 21401  
USA

**Tel: + 1 410 225 4800**

**Faxes: + 1 410 333 6059**

**Telegrams: Governor Schaefer, Annapolis, MD 21401, USA**

**Salutation: Dear Governor**

#### **COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

The Letters Editor  
Baltimore Sun  
501 N Calvert St  
Baltimore, MD 21278

**Fax: + 1 410 752 6059**

and to diplomatic representatives of the USA accredited to your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.