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Florida and Texas: Brothers Bush must stop this state-sanctioned vengeance

If the two executions set to take place in Florida and Texas in the next few hours go ahead, this will show once again how little regard US authorities have for international standards of justice, Amnesty International said today.

“Using the death penalty against the mentally ill and those convicted of crimes committed when they were children clearly flouts international safeguards,” Amnesty International said.

“The Governors of Florida and Texas, brothers Jeb and George W. Bush, must comply with the fundamental principle prohibiting the use of the death penalty where the level of culpability of the defendant, through youth or mental impairment, is in question.”

Thomas Harrison Provenzano is scheduled to die in Florida this evening. The judge who held extensive hearings into his mental state is in no doubt that this severely mentally ill man believes he is going to be killed because he is Jesus Christ. The judge made no secret that he was “troubled” in ruling that under the “minimal” domestic standards that govern such cases, Thomas Provenzano can be executed.

Gary Graham, also known as Shaka Sankofa, is in line to be killed in Texas on Thursday for a crime committed when he was 17. The USA leads the world in violating the international ban on the use of the death penalty against children. Amnesty International knows of 16 executions of child offenders worldwide since January 1993 -- 11 of these have been carried out in the USA.

In further violation of international minimum safeguards, Gary Graham was denied his right to adequate legal representation at his trial.

Convicted on the basis of a single, disputed, eyewitness testimony, his execution would also contravene the international principle that the death penalty may only be imposed “when the guilt of the person is based upon clear and convincing evidence leaving no room for an alternative explanation of the facts”.

“The USA claims to be a bastion of human rights,” Amnesty International said. “Yet in the next few hours another layer of hypocrisy could be added to that claim.”

Florida legislator Howard Futch commented last year that if Thomas Provenzano believes he is Jesus Christ then the state should “just crucify him”.

“Representative Futch’s statement showed once again that the death penalty is more about state sanctioned vengeance than about a genuine attempt to confront violent crime,” Amnesty International said.

Background

One hundred and eight countries in the world have abandoned the death penalty in law or practice. Although recent months have seen increasing domestic concern over the fairness and reliability of US death sentencing, executions continue apace.

Forty-eight prisoners have been executed so far this year in the USA. Three are scheduled for the next three days; Thomas Provenzano in Florida today, Russel Burket in Virginia tomorrow, and Gary Graham in Texas on Thursday.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>