

27 July 2000

Further information on UA 139/00 (AMR 51/83/00, 26 May 2000) and follow-ups (AMR 51/89/00, 2 June, AMR 51/105/00, 23 June, and AMR 51/111/00, 14 July) - Death penalty

USA (Texas) Juan Soria, Latino, aged 33 (26 July)  
Brian Roberson, black, aged 36 (9 August)  
Oliver Cruz, Latino, aged 33 (9 August)  
John Satterwhite, black, aged 53 (16 August)  
Richard Wayne Jones, white, aged 40 (22 August)  
David Earl Gibbs, white, aged 39 (23 August)  
Jeffery Caldwell, black, aged 37 (30 August)

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Juan Soria was executed on 26 July in Texas. He had been sentenced to death for the June 1985 murder of 17-year-old Allen Edward Bolden. Juan Soria was 18 at the time of the crime.

Last-minute appeals to stay the execution on the grounds that Soria was mentally incompetent for execution, that is, that he did not understand the reason for, or reality of, his punishment, were unsuccessful. Juan Soria had a history of self-mutilation and suicide attempts, the most recent of which took place a few days ago, and according to his lawyers, his mental condition had deteriorated in the past year. His family, who visited him last weekend reported that his mental health had worsened considerably. On 25 July, a psychologist employed by the defence to examine Juan Soria concluded that he was not competent for execution. The execution of the legally insane is prohibited under the US Constitution. Texas District Judge Joe Drago III denied appeals for a stay, saying there was insufficient evidence to support the claim of incompetency.

On 26 July, Amnesty International sent an appeal to Governor Bush from the International Secretariat, calling on him to intervene in the absence of a judicial remedy, noting that the execution of those "who have become insane" violates international standards agreed by the international community 15 years ago. The letter pointed out to Governor Bush "the immense damage that US executions, and in particular the large numbers being carried out in Texas in violation of international standards, including of the mentally impaired, are causing to the image of the USA abroad."

Local reports of the execution noted that as Juan Soria was strapped to the gurney, he was "covered with sheets to conceal numerous self-inflicted wounds." According to the reports, in his final statement Juan Soria compared his execution to surgery: "They say I'm going to have surgery, so I guess I will see everyone after the surgery is performed." He was pronounced dead seven minutes after the lethal solution began to flow.

Texas now accounts for 26 of the 56 executions carried out in the USA this year. Since the USA resumed executions in 1977, 654 prisoners have been put to death nationwide, 225 of them in Texas. One hundred and thirty eight prisoners have been executed in Texas since Governor Bush took office in January 1995.

**This action is now closing, and no further appeals are requested. Many thanks who have sent appeals. Please note that individualized Urgent Actions have been initiated on behalf of Brian Roberson and John Satterwhite.**