

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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## USA: More state killing on Human Rights Day

On 10 December 1948, the international community adopted a vision of a world free from state killing and cruelty. What does it say about the USA's present-day attitude to such aspirations that it is set to mark the 55th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by killing two more people in its death chambers?

Sadly, it is business as usual for US executioners. Last year, President George W. Bush proclaimed 10 December as Human Rights Day in the USA. Seven people were put to death there that week, designated by President Bush as Human Rights Week. This year, four people are scheduled for execution between 9 and 11 December.

These calculated killings are casting a growing shadow on the United States in an increasingly abolitionist world. Today 112 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. The USA's political leaders should be promoting abolition in their country, too. Their failure turns to hypocrisy when they trumpet the United States as global human rights champion.

On 14 January this year, President Bush, whose five-year governorship of Texas saw 152 executions there and whose presidency has seen the first federal executions since 1963, issued a proclamation promising that the United States will "continue to build a culture that respects life". On the same day, the USA carried out its first execution of the year, and has conducted 64 more since then.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights, recalling the Universal Declaration and other international human rights instruments, has repeatedly stressed that "abolition of the death penalty contributes to the enhancement of human dignity and to the progressive development of human rights".

According to its National Security Strategy, "the United States will champion aspirations for human dignity". That Strategy was published in September 2002, a month which saw seven executions in the USA. In the name of "security", President Bush has raised the prospect of executions of selected foreign nationals following trial by military commissions -- executive bodies, not independent or impartial courts -- without the right of appeal to any court.

The USA has all too often violated international law and safeguards in its pursuit of the death penalty, including by executing juvenile offenders, the mentally impaired, the inadequately represented, the possibly innocent, and foreign nationals denied their consular rights. This has surely undermined respect for human life as well as respect for the framework of international law and standards spawned by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

## Background

Kevin Zimmerman and Eddie Crawford are scheduled to be killed on 10 December in Texas and Georgia respectively. Billy Vickers and Bobby Hines are set to be put to death in Texas on 9 and 11 December respectively.

Kevin Zimmerman is facing execution for a murder that appears to have been less than capital murder, with evidence that his mental impairment rendered him unable to conform his conduct to the law. His lawyer is also challenging the Texas lethal injection process (used to kill 313 people since 1982), on the grounds that one of the chemicals that the state will use to kill his client may mask suffering. Under a new law, that chemical cannot be used in Texas in the euthanasia of cats and dogs.

Eddie Crawford's lawyers are seeking a stay of execution so that evidence in his case can be subjected to DNA testing. Eddie Crawford is a Vietnam veteran who returned from that war as an alcoholic suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. He was convicted of the murder of his niece.

Bobby Hines may have mental retardation. There are currently no procedures in place to ensure compliance with the US Supreme Court's ruling last year that the execution of people with mental retardation violates the constitutional ban on "cruel and unusual" punishment.

A total of 885 men and women have been executed in the USA since it resumed judicial killing in 1977 after the US Supreme Court lifted a moratorium on executions.

For more information please see: *USA: A lethal ideology: More state killing on Human Rights Day as 900th execution looms*<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR511492003>