

PUBLIC

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Further information on UA 330/04 (AMR 51/178/2004, 6 December 2004) - Death penalty

USA (Connecticut)

Michael Bruce Ross (m), white, aged 45

Connecticut Governor Jodi Rell has announced that she will not grant Michael Ross a reprieve. Michael Ross is scheduled to be executed by lethal injection in the early hours of 26 January 2005. He has dropped his appeals against his death sentence. The State of Connecticut has not carried out an execution for almost 45 years.

In a statement released on 6 December, Governor Rell said: "Recognizing that no one has been executed in Connecticut in more than 40 years, I directed my legal staff to provide me with a comprehensive review of the Constitution, state statutes and case law as they pertain to the death penalty. I also asked them to provide me with the specifics of Michael Ross's court cases. My responsibility as Governor, and as a humane person, required nothing less than a complete and thoughtful review of the facts. My decision had to transcend politics, emotion and personally-held beliefs.

"I can assure you that I have lost more than a few hours sleep in recent days as I read and re-read these briefs and documents. I agonized over the unspeakable pain and terror which the victims of Michael Ross must have experienced as they were raped and had their lives stolen from them. I have also tried to imagine the cold wave of horror rolling over the stunned families of these victims when they learned the fate of their loved ones at the hands of Mr Ross. This was not a decision I made lightly - nor should it have been. But it is one that I firmly believe to be right.

"No governor truly wants to face the type of decision that I have faced. But I took the oath of office little more than five months ago to uphold the laws of Connecticut – and the laws of Connecticut provide for the imposition of the death penalty – and I will not violate my oath and I will not shrink from my responsibility. Let me be clear about this: I have no sympathy for Michael Ross...

"Michael Ross alone is guilty of his crimes. He alone is responsible for the consequences of those crimes. There is no question about his guilt. There is no evidence that is missing or DNA that needs to be tested. Michael Ross admitted to heinously raping and strangling eight young women. Eight young women who left behind families that still grieve, families that still suffer, families whose hearts are broken anew every time Michael Ross's name is uttered and his crimes are revisited. For they too are his victims.

"As I said before, to uphold the existing laws of Connecticut is to uphold the death penalty. If the Legislature wishes to change the law, they will have three weeks from the time they convene their new session until the scheduled execution date of Mr. Ross to do so. It was the Legislature which put the death penalty on the books many, many years ago. It wasn't the court system. It wasn't the governor or any other constitutional officer. And it will be up to the Legislature to take the death penalty off the books, if that is their will.

"They have passed thousands of significant bills in the intervening years in far less than three weeks; some in three days or three hours. To those who say three weeks is insufficient time in which to thoughtfully debate this topic, I say the Legislature has already had more than two decades. And they have chosen not to repeal the law. However, if the Legislature does wish to take up this issue as they convene next month, I encourage them to do so, for the death penalty is an issue that evokes the strongest of positions and emotions. It is an issue that gives rise to true conflicts of conscience, and as the scheduled execution date of Michael Ross grows near, the profound gravity that surrounds the actual imposition of the death penalty becomes all too real and all too pointed.

“I do not believe that there are sufficient votes in the General Assembly to repeal the death penalty. I believe a majority of legislators wish to see this ultimate punishment remain the law. But if the Legislature does act, it must do so overwhelmingly for I will veto any repeal bill. I do believe there are crimes and actions which are so repugnant to society as to warrant the death penalty. And this is such a case... In the end, we are all judged by our deeds, not our words. Michael Ross has already been judged for his despicable deeds. Now it is time for him to face his punishment.”

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, regardless of the gravity of the crime, the guilt or innocence of the condemned, or the method used to kill the prisoner. The death penalty has not been shown to have a unique deterrent effect, it denies the possibility of remorse, rehabilitation or reconciliation, and it consumes resources that could otherwise be used towards constructive strategies to combat violent crime and to offer assistance to those affected by it. Executions cannot guarantee emotional peace for the relatives of murder victims, risk brutalizing society, and undermine respect for fundamental human rights. However heinous the crime, and even if the prisoner has dropped his or her appeals, there is no disguising the fact that the state is involved in a premeditated killing, a policy that is a symptom of a culture of violence rather than a solution to it. The state is taking to refined, calculated heights what it seeks to condemn B the deliberate taking of human life.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please continue to send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language, making your own arguments or those contained in the original action:

- expressing sympathy for the families of the murder victims in this case, and explaining that you are not seeking in any way to excuse the manner of their deaths or to minimize the suffering caused;
- welcoming the fact that the State of Connecticut has not carried out an execution since 1960, during which time more than a hundred countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice;
- regretting the Governor's announcement that she will not issue a reprieve in the case of Michael Ross;
- urging her to reconsider her decision, not out of sympathy for Michael Ross, or out of a lack of empathy for the murder victims and their families, but in order to reject her own and her state's involvement in the killing of a human being, however terrible the crimes of which he was convicted;
- urging her to do all in her power to prevent the State of Connecticut from taking this backward step, and expressing concern at her stated intention to veto any abolitionist bill that is passed by the legislature.

APPEALS TO:

Governor M. Jodi Rell
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Hartford, CT 06106
USA

Email: Governor.Rell@po.state.ct.us

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Salutation: Dear Governor

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of the USA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.