

EXTRA182/99

Death pen**USA (Texas)Larry Keith Robison, aged 42**

---

Larry Robison is scheduled to be executed in Texas on 21 January 2000. He was sentenced to death for the murder of Bruce Gardner in 1982. Several years before the murder he had been diagnosed as suffering from paranoid schizophrenia.

On 10 August 1982, Junette Bryant found the decapitated and mutilated body of her son Ricky Bryant at his home in Fort Worth, Texas. Next door, the police found the bodies of Georgia Reed and her 11-year-old son Scott, as well as those of Earline Barker and Bruce Gardner. Each of the victims had been shot in the head and their throats slit. Georgia Reed had also been stabbed numerous times.

Larry Robison has never denied killing the five victims (although he was only tried for the murder of Bruce Gardner), but has maintained that the crime was the result of his mental illness. In a written account after the crime, he recalled how he had been called upon to liberate souls to ascend to a higher plane of existence, and described his hallucination that Ricky Bryant had urged him on even as he worked to sever his head from his body. Larry Robison described how a digital clock in the bathroom had flipped to a row of zeros and had then begun acting like a stop watch. He wrote that he had interpreted this as a message that he had to liberate as many souls as possible before the liberation of his own.

Larry Robison was first convicted in 1983, but this conviction was reversed in 1986 by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals because of an error during jury selection. At his retrial in 1987, he again pleaded "not guilty by reason of insanity" but again the jury rejected this plea, finding him guilty of capital murder.

Larry Robison came within hours of execution on 17 August 1999. He was on his way to the lethal injection chamber when the Court of Criminal Appeals issued a stay. His lawyers had filed a last-minute appeal on the grounds that he was mentally incompetent to be executed. After a hearing, however, a judge ruled on 15 November that he was competent to be executed.

For further information about Larry Robison's crime, trial and illness, see *Time for Humanitarian Intervention: The imminent execution of Larry Robison* (AMR 51/107/99, July 1999).

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

That Larry Robison's crime was of a very serious nature, and has caused immeasurable suffering, is not in question. His execution will not serve justice, however, but simply be the final act of a state's failure to find an earlier, appropriate response to his mental illness. As the non-governmental US organization, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, states: "the death penalty is never appropriate for a defendant suffering from schizophrenia or other serious brain disorders."

The Texas authorities will no doubt justify this human rights violation by arguing that two trial juries rejected Larry Robison's insanity plea, and that a judge found him competent to be executed. This does not alter the fact that Larry Robison had already been diagnosed as suffering from paranoid

schizophrenia before he committed his crime, providing at the very least reasonable doubt of his legal sanity at the time of the killings. His case has generated much attention both inside and outside the USA, particularly as a result of the struggle of his mother, Lois Robison, who has campaigned tirelessly for his and other death sentences to be commuted and who had tried to get treatment for her son before he did anything violent (see document referred to above).

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases and believes that every death sentence is an affront to human dignity. Each execution is a symptom of, not a solution to, the culture of violence. Texas has accounted for 199 of the 598 executions nationwide since the USA resumed executions in 1977. It has consistently violated international human rights standards in its use of the death penalty.

Amnesty International is calling on Governor Bush to use his power to stop this execution as a genuine move away from his state's appalling record on the death penalty. Governor Bush has overseen 112 executions in his five-year governorship. He is currently campaigning to become the Republican Party's candidate for US President under the slogan "compassionate conservatism". In addition to the planned execution of Larry Robison, John Penry, a severely mentally retarded man, is due to be executed in Texas on 13 January (see EXTRA 177/99, AMR 51/210/99, 14 December 1999), and Glen McGinnis on 25 January, for a crime committed when he was a child (see UA 320/99, AMR 51/213/99, 16 December 1999).

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/E-mails/express/airmail letters, in your own words, in English or your own language:**

- acknowledging the serious nature of the crime of which Larry Robison was convicted, and expressing sympathy for the victims' relatives and friends;
- expressing deep concern, however, that Larry Robison is scheduled to be executed, despite being diagnosed as suffering from paranoid schizophrenia before his crime;
- noting that the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill opposes the use of the death penalty against those who suffer from such illnesses;
- voicing concern at Texas's shameful record on the death penalty, and its repeated violations of international standards in its use of this punishment;
- noting that Governor Bush is campaigning to become a leader on the world stage under a slogan which uses the word "compassion";
- urging him to stop the execution of Larry Robison and other executions scheduled for January (including John Penry and Glen McGinnis), and offer the leadership required to take Texas away from the death penalty.

**APPEALS TO:**

The Honourable George W. Bush  
Governor of Texas, PO Box 12428, Austin,  
TX 78711-2428, USA

**Telegrams: Governor Bush, Austin, Texas, USA**

**Faxes: + 1 512 463 1849**

**E-mails: bcrosby@governor.state.tx.us**

**Salutation: Dear Governor**

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

You may also send letters of concern (not more than 250 words) to:

Letters to the Editor, *Dallas Morning News*, PO Box 655237, Dallas, TX 75265, USA. **Faxes: + 1 972 263 0456. E-mails: [letterstoeditor@dallasnews.com](mailto:letterstoeditor@dallasnews.com)**

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY**