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Clemency for US death row prisoner Troy Davis denied

The State Board of Pardons and Paroles in the US state of Georgia must reconsider their decision to deny clemency for a US man facing the death penalty, Amnesty International said today after the ruling cleared the way for his execution on Wednesday.

Troy Davis was sentenced to death in 1991 for the murder of police officer Mark Allen Macphail in Savannah, Georgia.

“This is a huge setback for human rights in the USA, where a man who has been condemned under dubious evidence is to be executed by the state. Even at this late stage, the Board must reconsider its decision,” said Salil Shetty, Amnesty International’s Secretary General.

“The decision by Georgia’s Board of Pardons and Paroles to reject Troy Davis’ appeal for clemency is obviously at odds with their 2007 decision when they counselled against execution if there was ‘doubt as to the guilt of the accused’ ”, said Salil Shetty.

The case against Troy Davis primarily rested on witness testimony. Since his 1991 trial, seven of key nine witnesses have recanted or changed their testimony, some alleging police coercion.

“Even if members of the Board were convinced that there was no doubt, many other people have not been so persuaded.”

“Clearly, the US capital justice system is capable of making mistakes. The persistent doubts that have plagued the Troy Davis case point to a fundamental flaw of the death penalty. It is irrevocable – and in the USA, the death penalty is also marked by arbitrariness, discrimination and error,” Salil Shetty added.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases and under all circumstances.

The organization’s activists have campaigned extensively on Troy Davis’ behalf, delivering nearly one million signatures to authorities in Georgia to urge them to commute his death sentence: vigils and events have been held in approximately 300 locations around the world.

Since Troy Davis has been on death row, more than 90 prisoners have been released from death rows around the USA on grounds of innocence. In each case, at trial the defendant had been found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

In the past four years, three states in the USA – New Jersey, New Mexico and Illinois – have legislated to abolish the death penalty. The inability to exclude errors, and the potential for executing the innocent, were major arguments in these processes, convincing even some previous supporters of the death penalty.

In contrast to the 139 countries worldwide that have abolished the death penalty in law or practice, the USA currently has more than 3,200 people on its death rows, and has executed more than 1,200 prisoners

since resuming judicial killing in 1977. Currently Georgia has over 100 people on its death row and three people have been executed in this state in 2011 already.