

USA -- New Amnesty International report : "Consensual" executions, Timothy McVeigh, and the brutalizing futility of the death penalty

Amnesty International today issued a report on "consensual" executions in the USA -- that is executions of prisoners who give up their appeals and "ask" to be put to death. Since 1977, 90 such executions have been carried out.

"Whether consensual or not, executions simply serve to reiterate the cruelty and brutalizing futility of a government policy which toys with human life and responds to killing with further killing," Amnesty International said.

Timothy McVeigh is scheduled to become the first federal death row prisoner executed in the USA since 1963. Convicted of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing in which 168 people were killed and hundreds more injured, he is due to be put to death by lethal injection on 16 May 2001. He is refusing to appeal his sentence or petition for clemency. Some have expressed concern that he is attempting to turn himself into a martyr figure, and that his execution may lead to acts of retaliatory violence by individuals who share his political beliefs.

"The McVeigh case illustrates how the practice of capital punishment allows murderers to set society's moral tone," Amnesty International said.

"Timothy McVeigh is considered by many a textbook example of why the death penalty is justified. However, evidence shows that rather than deterring crime the death penalty may actually increase violence in society," the organization continued. "We are asking President Bush to finally consider this evidence and take action to eradicate this cruel, irrevocable and outdated punishment."

Amnesty International's report contains an annotated appendix of the 90 "consensual" executions, including that of Gary Gilmore, the first person put to death after the US Supreme Court lifted a moratorium on executions in 1976.

The report also contains a statement on the McVeigh case by the anti-death penalty organization, Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation, and a statement from Bud Welch, whose daughter was killed in the Oklahoma bombing.

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