

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 118/96

Death Penalty

29 July 1996

USA (ARKANSAS) William Frank Parker (aka Frankie Parker)

William Frank Parker, white, is scheduled to be executed in Arkansas on 8 August 1996.

Parker was sentenced to death in November 1985 for the murder of his ex-wife's parents, Sandra and James Warren Rogers. He was under the influence of drugs and alcohol at the time of the crime. While in prison, Parker has become a devout Buddhist, and according to press reports, the Dalai Lama and Buddhists worldwide have appealed for clemency on his behalf .

BACKGROUND

As of 30 April 1996, there were 37 prisoners under sentence of death in Arkansas.

The method of execution is lethal injection, although prisoners sentenced to death before 4 March 1983 may choose the method of their execution - either lethal injection or electrocution. The Governor of Arkansas has full clemency authority. However, all clemency applications are referred to the state Parole Board for investigation and recommendation. In May, the Board decided by a vote of five to none not to advise the Governor to commute Parker's sentence.

If the execution goes ahead as scheduled, it will be the first execution to take place in Arkansas under its new governor, Mike Huckabee who took office in the middle of July, after the resignation of Jim Guy Tucker. According to information received, former Governor Tucker had scheduled Parker's execution date for 17 September, but Governor Huckabee brought the execution forward, stating that his responsibility lay with the victims rather than the criminal, and that "we should do this as soon as possible and bring closure to the case". Parker's attorney, who was expecting to have two months to file an appeal on Parker's behalf, has had just two weeks to do the same.

The most recent person to be executed in Arkansas was Barry Lee Fairchild, on 31 August 1995.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, as a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please make urgent appeals by telephone/telegram/fax/express and airmail letters in English if possible:

Appeals from religious groups, particularly Buddhists, would be particularly helpful.

- urging Governor Huckabee to grant clemency to William Frank Parker by commuting his death sentence;
- expressing sympathy for the victims of violent crime, and their families and friends and acknowledging the seriousness of the crime for which William Frank Parker was sentenced to death,
- stating opposition to the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and citing arguments against the death penalty, for example:

- that detailed research has shown that in the USA, the death penalty is imposed in an arbitrary and racist manner - on the poor, on ethnic minorities, the mentally ill or retarded, and those who have not had adequate legal representation at trial;
- that the death penalty has never been shown to deter violent crime more effectively than any other punishment;
- that execution is irrevocable and despite the most stringent judicial safeguards, can be inflicted on the innocent.

APPEALS TO:

The Hon Mike Huckabee
Governor of Arkansas
205 State Capitol

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Telegrams: Governor Huckabee, Little Rock, AR 72201, USA

Salutation: Dear Governor Huckabee

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and to diplomatic representatives of the USA in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.