

URGENT ACTION

TWENTIETH EXECUTION OF THE YEAR IN TEXAS

Khristian Oliver was executed in the US state of Texas on the evening of 5 November. He was sentenced to death in 1999 for the murder of Joe Collins committed during a burglary.

On 17 March 1998, 64-year-old Joe Collins returned to his home in Nacogdoches County in rural eastern Texas to find a burglary in progress. As the two burglars in the house tried to escape (two others had stayed in their car), he shot one of them, a 15-year-old boy, in the leg. The other burglar, 20-year-old Khristian Oliver, shot Joe Collins before striking him on the head with a rifle butt, according to accomplice testimony at Oliver's April 1999 trial.

After Khristian Oliver's trial, evidence emerged that jurors had consulted the Bible during their sentencing deliberations, included the passage, "And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death". In 2008, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals found that the jurors had "crossed an important line" by consulting specific passages in the Bible that described the very facts at issue in the case. However it upheld the death sentence, and in April 2009, the US Supreme Court refused to take the case.

The Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles denied clemency on 4 November. The state's Governor Rick Perry refused to issue a reprieve. Final appeals to the courts were unsuccessful, with the US Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit declining to intervene on 3 November, and the US Supreme Court refusing to stay the execution on 5 November.

Khristian Oliver becomes the 20th prisoner to be put to death in Texas this year out of a total of 43 executions in the USA. There have now been 1,179 executions in the USA since judicial killing resumed there in 1977. Texas accounts for 443 of these executions, with 204 having been carried out since Governor Perry became governor in 2001 (see USA: Too much cruelty, too little clemency: Texas nears 200th execution under current governor, April 2009, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/057/2009/en>).

NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUESTED. MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO SENT APPEALS.

This is the first update of UA 266/09 (AMR 51/108/2009). Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/108/2009/en>

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