

EXTRA 87/00

Death pen

USA (3 states) Garry Dean Miller, white, aged 33
Daniel Joe Hittle, white, aged 50
Claude Howard Jones, white, aged 60
Christopher Goins, black, aged 25
Edward Castro, Hispanic, aged 50
Robert Dewey Glock, white, aged 39

Six men are scheduled to be executed in the USA in a four-day period beginning 5 December. All were convicted of capital murder.

Garry Miller, Daniel Hittle and Claude Jones are due to be executed in Texas on 5, 6 and 7 December respectively. In Florida, Edward Castro and Robert Glock are due to be executed on 7 and 8 December. Christopher Goins is scheduled to be executed in Virginia on 6 December.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This year has seen unprecedented national concern about the fairness of the US capital justice system, with calls for a moratorium on executions coming from many quarters. Nevertheless, after a lull in executions prior to the 7 November presidential election, the pace of US state killing is beginning to pick up again. There were more executions in the 10 days following the election than there had been during the 10 weeks leading up to it (seven to six). There have been 79 executions this year.

International standards seek to progressively limit the scope of the death penalty with a view to its abolition. Amnesty International believes that all political leaders should take every opportunity to use their power and influence to further this goal. The majority of US leaders have manifestly failed to do so, not least in Texas, Virginia and Florida, which account for 54 per cent of the 677 executions that have been carried out since US executions resumed in 1977 (Texas - 236; Virginia - 80; and Florida - 49).

In his inaugural address on 17 January 1995, Governor George W Bush Jr of Texas said: "We must make Texas a beacon state". He claims to have achieved this aim and labels himself as a "compassionate" leader. Nevertheless, since he took office, 149 executions have been carried out in Texas.

Compassion was also a central theme of Governor Jeb Bush's inaugural speech in Florida on 5 January 1999: "True compassion invariably begins with a single person... We should be known for the compassion of our dreams as much as their grandeur". In December 1999, Governor Bush announced his aim to speed up the capital appeals process, despite the fact that Florida accounts for more wrongful capital convictions than any other state.

In his inaugural speech of 17 January 1998, Governor James Gilmore of Virginia proclaimed: "Virginia's march into the 21st century begins today". Since then, a further 12 countries have abolished the death penalty, taking the total that have abandoned judicial killing in law or practice to 108, more than half the countries of the world. In the same period, 34 prisoners have been put to death in Virginia, almost half the total number executed in the state since 1977.

Amnesty International is urging President Clinton to prevent the first federal execution since 1963, scheduled to take place on 12 December, in accordance

with his claim that the USA has become a "more decent, more humane" country under his presidency, and "the leading force for human rights around the world" (see *Memorandum to President Clinton: An appeal for human rights leadership as the first federal execution looms*, AMR 51/158/00, 14 November 2000). As the USA waits to discover who its next president will be, the Urgent Action Network is asked to write to the country's two most recent Republican and Democrat Presidents to ask them to urge the Governors of Florida, Texas and Virginia to rethink their position on the death penalty in line with modern standards of justice and decency.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language, IN YOUR OWN WORDS, using the following guide:

- explaining that you are writing to the addressee to urge him, as a former US President, to use his influence for the promotion of human rights;
- expressing sympathy for the victims of crime and their families, but noting that more than half of the countries of the world now confront the problem of violent crime without resorting to the death penalty;
- submitting that the USA cannot claim to be a progressive force for human rights while its leaders allow its increasing isolation on this fundamental human rights issue, and suggesting that the USA's use of the death penalty is causing substantial damage to the USA's reputation abroad;
- noting that Florida, Texas and Virginia account for more than half of all US executions since 1977, and expressing concern that six men are due to be killed in these states during a four-day period beginning 5 December;
- urging the former presidents to appeal to the Governors of Florida, Texas and Virginia to provide the leadership to stop the impending executions, and to support steps for a moratorium on executions in their states.

APPEALS TO:

The Honourable George Bush
10000 Memorial Drive, Suite 900
Houston, TX 77024, USA

Fax: + 1 979 260 9557

(c/o George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, College Station, near Houston.
Add: "Please forward to Mr Bush")

Salutation: Dear Mr Bush

The Honourable Jimmy Carter
The Carter Center, One Copenhill
453 Freedom Parkway, Atlanta, GA 30307, USA

Fax: + 1 404 331 0283

Salutation: Dear Mr Carter

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

Participants may also send appeals to the Governors, urging them to do all in their power to stop the scheduled execution(s) in their state. You may use the extracts from their inaugural statements in your appeals.

The Honourable George W Bush Jr, Governor of Texas,
PO Box 12428, Austin, TX 78711-3401, USA.

Faxes: + 1 512 463 1849 or + 1 512 637 8800

E-mail: <http://www.governor.state.tx.us/email.html>

Salutation: Dear Governor

The Honourable Jeb Bush, Governor of Florida,
The Capitol, Tallahassee, FL 32399, USA

Fax: + 1 850 487 0801

Salutation:Dear Governor

The Honourable James Gilmore, Governor of Virginia,
State Capitol Richmond, VA 23219, USA

Fax: + 1 804 371 6351

E-mail: governor@gov.state.va.us

Salutation:Dear Governor

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.