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# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 02/94

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## NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - USA

**PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING FOR RESPONSE IF YOU GET QUERIES:** Kuwait Trial: Fourteen defendants, 11 Iraqis and three Kuwaitis, charged with participating in an alleged Iraqi government plot to assassinate the former US President George Bush were due to be sentenced on 25 December 1993. However, at this hearing the sentencing was postponed until 5 February 1994. In a surprise ruling the Judge announced a six-week recess and said that he wanted to re-examine a prosecution witness and possibly some defendants when the trial resumes on 5 February.

AI fears that, if convicted, 12 of the 14 could be sentenced to death after a trial which has not met internationally recognised standards for fair trial.

**PLEASE NOTE** - News Service items on both prison riots in Venezuela and the uprising in Chiapas, Mexico are currently going through approvals. Our apologies for the length of time these are taking, which is unfortunately out of the press office's hands.

## NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

### INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Tunisia - 12 January

UN Peacekeeping operations - 4 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

UK - 9 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

**\*\*South Africa - 16 February\*\* THIS DATE IS LIKELY TO BE POSTPONED. WE WILL KEEP YOU INFORMED OF A NEW DATE WHEN IT IS SET.**

Kuwait - 24 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

### TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Jamaica - 5 January - SEE NEWS SERVICE 172/173

USA death penalty - 14 January - **PLEASE NOTE** The text of this news release was sent out to you today and contains a mistake. In the penultimate paragraph, beginning: "Only misplaced political will...", we say that 35 people were executed last year. In fact, 38 people were executed in 1993. Many thanks to Riccardo of the Italian Section for spotting this and letting us know!

Despite the fact that President Clinton will be out of the USA next week, the embargo date of the Open Letter and news release on the death penalty will not be changed. They are confirmed at 0001 hrs gmt Friday 14 January.

Zaire - 2 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

### FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Women - 8 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161

Saudi Arabia - 10 March more details to follow

Colombia - 16 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 123 + UAs AMR 23/56-57/93

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**USA: FIRST EXECUTION IN IDAHO SINCE 1957**

The first execution of the New Year in the USA has been carried out in Idaho, which until 6 January 1994 had not executed anyone since 1957.

Keith Wells, white, aged 31, was sentenced to death for the December 1990 murders of John Justad and Brandi Rains, both white, during a robbery in a bar. Wells is one of an increasing number of prisoners who have been executed after choosing to give up their appeals and agreeing to the state carrying out their executions. "The execution of prisoners who have chosen to abandon their appeals and allow the state to carry out their execution in no way relieves the state of its awesome responsibility in taking the life of one of its citizens, or excuses such executions," Amnesty International said.

According to newspaper reports, earlier this year Wells wrote to judges and attorneys involved in his case relinquishing his right to all appeals, dismissing his attorneys and demanding that his execution be carried out as soon as possible. In his letter he apparently said "...I feel that prolonging my life through years of appeals will only serve to prolong the pain and grief of not only my family members and loved ones, but that of the victims families and loved ones as well. This suffering MUST STOP so the healing can begin."

He went on to say "The cost both in monetary and emotional well being, for all concerned, taxpayers, family, friends and victims alike, for keeping me confined in a 7' x 14' concrete and steel box year after year, is a wasted and irresponsible one. Especially when all that money and energy can be better spent on things that really mean something, ie Hunger, Poverty, Drug addiction treatment, etc. etc."

Apparently court records showed that Keith Wells took drugs and alcohol in his childhood. After a failed robbery at the age of 16 Wells spent some time in a mental hospital. At age 17 he was sent to prison for armed robbery.

Amnesty International understands that there were allegations that Keith Wells had a history of mental illness, although it has not been able to confirm this. Apart from the organization's unconditional opposition to the death penalty as a violation of the right to life, Keith Wells' execution may be contrary to the Safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty, adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in May 1989 (Resolution 1989/64), which recommends:

"Eliminating the death penalty for persons suffering from mental retardation or extremely limited mental competence, whether at the stage of sentence or execution."

The USA stands alone among western industrialized nations in its continued use of capital punishment. Nearly half the countries of the world have abolished the death penalty in law or practice, a trend which is especially noticeable in both western and eastern Europe. Countries which have abolished the death penalty for all offences since 1989 include the Czech and Slovak Republics, Romania, Cambodia, Angola, Slovenia, Mozambique and Namibia. South Africa suspended all executions in February 1990. In 1992, Paraguay abolished the death penalty for ordinary offences.

There has been a disturbing increase in the number of executions being carried out in the USA in recent years. Thirty-eight prisoners were executed in the USA in 1993, more than in any previous single year since states revised their death penalty statutes in the mid-1970s. In the last two years five states have carried out their first executions in a quarter century or more; one of these after 46 years.