

PUBLIC

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Further information on UA 24/00 (AMR 51/19/00, 31 January 2000) and follow-up (AMR 51/30/00, 21 February) - Death Penalty

USA (TEXAS) Betty Lou Beets (f), aged 62

Betty Lou Beets was executed in Texas on 24 February 2000, two weeks before her 63rd birthday. She leaves five children, nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. She made no final statement as she was put to death by lethal injection.

The Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles voted to deny clemency on 22 February, leaving Governor George Bush the option of granting a 30-day reprieve. Returning briefly to Texas from presidential campaigning in California, he rejected this option on 24 February, after the federal courts had refused appeals that Betty Beets's history of victimization at the hands of men be properly examined by the state. Governor Bush issued a brief statement which said: "After careful review of the evidence in the case I concur with the jury that Betty Lou Beets is guilty of this murder. I am confident that the courts, both state and federal, have thoroughly reviewed all the issues raised by the defendant. The courts, including the US Supreme Court, have rejected all of her appeals. I concur with the recommendation of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles and will not grant a 30-day delay."

Governor Bush failed to point out that the jury which sentenced Betty Lou Beets to death were not aware of crucial mitigating evidence, including her traumatic history of severe physical and sexual abuse from an early age. Neither were the jury aware of evidence directly contradicting the prosecution's claim that she had killed her husband for financial gain -- the aggravating factor in the crime that made it punishable by death.

Governor Bush's decision to participate in the cycle of violence again gives the lie to his claims to be a "compassionate" or "reforming" leader, and his claim to have made Texas a "beacon state". It was the 121st execution under his five-year governorship -- far more than under any other US governor, and more than most countries. Many of the executions were carried out in violation of international standards. On 24 February, the *Houston Chronicle* wrote that the impact on Governor Bush's presidential campaign of his decision to allow the execution to go ahead is "yet to be seen", noting that "time and time again, he has rejected pleas from those who claimed to have been mentally ill or were juveniles at the time of their crimes."

In a 24 February news release issued from the International Secretariat, Amnesty International said: "With pretensions to be a leader on the world stage, Governor George W Bush may wish to consider what his record on the death penalty is doing to his reputation internationally." (AMR 51/32/00). The execution of Betty Beets and the national and international opposition to it has once again focused international concern on US and Texas standards of justice.

The United Nations Special Rapporteurs on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and on violence against women, Asthma Jahangir and Radhika Coomaraswamy, were among those who called on Governor Bush to stop the execution. They expressed their concern that "abuse and extreme violence suffered by Betty Lou Beets were not considered by the investigating authorities or by the courts when convicting and sentencing her for murder."

The Special Rapporteurs appealed to Governor Bush to consider "the specific circumstances of the crime and in particular the violent abuse which Betty Lou Beets suffered at the hands of her spouses and the effect of this abuse on her state of mind and her actions." They noted that Betty Beets would be the second woman to be executed in Texas since the beginning of the last century. They wrote that the previous execution -- of Karla Faye Tucker on 4 February 1998 -- had "brought worldwide condemnation of a state death penalty process incapable of showing mercy...".

Governor Bush's office reported that he had received more than 1,100 letters and more than 2,000 phone calls appealing for clemency. It said that two letters and 55 phone calls were in favour of execution.

Betty Beets became the ninth person to be executed in Texas this year, and the 208th since Texas resumed executions in 1982.

The USA has now executed 18 prisoners in 2000, and 616 since judicial killing resumed in 1977, including four women.

No further action is requested. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.